

July 17, 2012

Office of the Chief Financial Officer

To: Officials in Charge

From: Chief Financial Officer

Subject: Changes to NASA's Conference Sponsorship and Attendance Policies

Recently, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released new policy guidance on travel and conference expenditures. Moreover, the Executive Council decided to implement expanded reporting requirements regarding conference sponsorship and attendance to ensure conferences the Agency funds are consistent with legal requirements and represent the most efficient use of taxpayer funds. Under the leadership of the Administrator, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer will implement these new requirements in close coordination with all Offices and the Centers. Some of the key changes are as follows:

1. Conference Definition: OMB M-12-12 made the Federal Travel Regulation's (FTR) definition of "conference" applicable for purposes of controlling and reporting conferences for all agencies. Additional guidance on this definition and FAQs concerning its application in common situations can be found at OCFO's conference website [here](#).

2. Conference Approval Process: To accommodate NASA's external requirements relating to conferences, we will be moving to a tiered approval process as follows: (a) any conference (sponsored – as a primary or minor sponsor - or attended) exceeding \$500,000 requires a waiver by the Administrator; (b) any conference (sponsored as a primary or minor sponsor or attended) exceeding \$75,000 will be reviewed for approval by the Deputy Administrator and will require a recommendation by a Headquarters Official in Charge (OIC) or Center Director; and (c) all conference sponsorships, as well as conferences hosted by NASA costing over \$20,000, must be approved by an OIC or Center Director. Until the new policies can be promulgated and reviewed by OMB, the Deputy Administrator will continue to review NASA sponsored conferences under the current NPR 9700 criteria (over \$20,000, primarily sponsored by NASA), using the current forms and processes.

3. Strengthening Current Processes, including:

(a) Improved planning: Conference sponsors should update and amend their preliminary estimate as the conference date approaches. More timely and realistic estimates (within 25% of approved plans, as amended) are needed for NASA sponsored conferences and will now be tracked and reviewed at the Agency Baseline Performance Reviews.

(b) Senior Focus: All OICs and Center Directors are being asked to appoint a senior point of contact (POC) to oversee their local conference activities and expenditures. While each Office and Center

already has a POC to help with technical guidance about conferences, the type of focus needed for achieving the intent of OMB M-11-35 and M-12-12, and support of the Deputy Administrator's reviews, requires more senior leadership within each office and Center.

(c) Restriction on Food: NASA will no longer be directly using its appropriated funds for food at its conferences. Similarly, widely attended gathering determinations will no longer be issued for events at, or held in conjunction with, NASA sponsored conferences. This does not prohibit individuals from paying directly for food, and NASA will be looking at no-cost contracts as a possible vehicle to help facilitate meals or refreshments as appropriate. This restriction on food does not apply to non-conference events like training (as defined in the Government Employees Training Act) or awards ceremonies that are not part of a conference.

Interim guidance and changes in forms will be posted on the OCFO conference website and distributed to your conference POCs as soon as it becomes available. Some of these changes will require policy and system reviews that may take several months before implementation is complete, but we will be working closely with the conference POC team to help this process happen as expeditiously and smoothly as possible. We will also be forwarding a data call shortly about past conference costs, in response to several recent Congressional requests.

Tomorrow, the Administrator will also send out a high-level, NASA-wide email to alert employees to the changing rules and the need for their participation in implementing them correctly.

During this transition period OCFO will be regularly updating your local office or Center conference POC with the status of all these efforts and answering questions about the changed policies and processes, so please have interested persons see them (a list of POCs can be found [here](#)) for local questions they may have. Of course, please feel free to call me or my Director for Policy, Kevin Buford (at 202-358-0405), directly if you have any questions as we implement these changes.