

Over-Application of Travel Restrictions 2015-02-02 (SC-02)

Recommendation:

The Council finds that there continues to be a major problem with travel restrictions on science contractors and recommends NASA reconsider Recommendation 2015-01-02 (SC-01) and stop including science programs funded through contracts with the travel restrictions externally mandated for Civil Servants.

Major Reasons for Proposing the Recommendation:

NASA's decision to include Contractors in externally mandated tracking and approval of Civil Service travel is substantially harming NASA science. The effectiveness of our missions depends on dissemination of the results to other scientists and open communications at scientific meetings are absolutely essential for the scientific enterprise.

Consequences of No Action on the Proposed Recommendation:

Significant harm to NASA science and continued additional work, higher costs, lower workforce morale and less productivity.

NASA Response:

NASA non-concurs in this recommendation, as was noted in our earlier response to the NASA Advisory Council dated April 2, 2015. Important to note is the content of our response to the original recommendation:

- There are currently no limitations on travel (civil servants and contractor employees) as long as the travel is within budget and approved by appropriate supervisors.
- If the travel is to a conference, the following guidance applies. There are no limitations on the number of attendees for domestic conference attendance (civil servant and contractor employees). The only such limitation on conference attendance is the statutory limit of 50 persons participating in a **foreign** conference. NASA applies this 50-person limitation only to civil servants and Jet Propulsion Laboratory employees. Those who are funded through grants and cooperative agreements are exempt from this limitation.
- All NASA participants (civil servants and contractor employees) for all conference events must be entered into NASA's Conference Tracking System (whether there are costs or not) as well as non-NASA participants where NASA is paying for all or some of their costs. This tracking is necessary due to the external requirement (codified in Federal law) to report agency conference spending for conferences costing the Agency over \$20,000. NASA is also required by Federal law to have conferences costing the Agency \$100,000 or more and \$500,000 or more, approved specifically by the Deputy Administrator and Administrator respectively. NASA's Conference Tracking System helps to facilitate this process.

In addition to the above and unlike many other agencies, NASA continues to promote attendance at conferences. Evidence of this is the fact that NASA continues to send employees to certain key scientific conferences now at levels equal or greater than we have in the past. For example, this was

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the case for the American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting, and the Lunar and Planetary Science Conference. This is a result of NASA's position that conferences are a key vehicle for scientific collaboration and thus, NASA makes efforts to promote attendance. NASA recently completed a communications campaign across the Agency to provide direction to managers and ensure all employees (both civil servant and contractor) know that as long as they have supervisory approval and funding, they are able to go to conferences.

Note that the definition of a conference in the Federal Travel Regulations is the following: the term "conference" means a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel." NASA has a very broad-minded interpretation of this, as can be seen in the NASA Interim Directive 9700.1A, and has exempted most operational and programmatic meetings.

NASA will continue to promote conference participation while ensuring the Agency complies with Federal law.