

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

**Headquarters**

Washington, DC 20546-0001



February 8, 2013

Reply to Attn of:

OLIA/2012-01011f:SS:amb

The Honorable Darrell Issa  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and  
Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Issa:

This is in further response to your letters of April 10, 2012 and April 30, 2012, to the Administrator requesting information regarding NASA conference and travel expenditures from January 1, 2005 to the present. The enclosed report provides the detailed information requested in your letter of April 10, 2012.

While NASA has been steadily enhancing its conference review processes since 2008, it made a number of significant improvements in FY 2012. Starting in October 2011, in accordance with Administration direction, NASA required that all NASA-sponsored conferences be centrally reviewed and approved by the Deputy Administrator; this process also required improved documentation of the planning and justification for the investments made in conferences hosted by NASA. Starting in May 2012, again in accordance with Administration guidance, NASA implemented reviews of spending and senior approvals for all conferences with costs over \$100,000. In June 2012, NASA updated its conference policies to enhance review and approval requirements for NASA-sponsored conferences with costs less than \$100,000, and to ban industry and others' widely attended gatherings and NASA-directly funded meals at NASA-sponsored conferences. This focus, along with the overall emphasis placed on travel savings at all levels, led to millions of dollars in reduced spending on conferences in FY 2012.

NASA also spearheaded several key internal initiatives, including savings in connection with NASA's three largest internal conferences, by directing that all three be changed in the coming years to a virtual format (and piloting the first of these as a virtual event in October 2012). For one of these conferences that was already essentially underway, NASA reduced its size significantly. These changes are conservatively estimated to have saved over \$2 million in FY 2012. In addition, NASA centralized a conference database tool to permit better coordinated planning across the Agency, and expanded

the scope of events tracked as “conferences,” consistent with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum 12-12, issued in May 2012. This broader definition was also applied retroactively, so the information in the enclosed report encompasses more types of events than prior reports by NASA.

NASA spent the vast majority of the funds (80 percent in FY 2012) associated with conference attendance for presentations and participation at scientific and technical conferences. This practice helps to fulfill one of the fundamental mandates of the National Aeronautics and Space Act that NASA “shall provide for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information concerning its activities and the results thereof.” At such events, NASA scientists, engineers, and leaders present scientific and technical papers and participate in interchanges on leading-edge research and technology with peers in the Federal government, the science community, the aeronautics and aerospace industries, and our international partners at conferences. Conferences attended and sponsored by NASA address a broad and diverse range of scientific and engineering challenges faced by NASA in carrying out its missions, including climate and other Earth science research, advanced aeronautics, and the cutting-edge technologies needed for both current and planned robotic and human space flight programs. As the enclosed report shows, in keeping with past reports to NASA’s Office of Inspector General and Congress, a clear majority of conferences sponsored by NASA were undertaken in furtherance of this key statutory goal.

In addition to facilitating the dissemination and advancement of scientific research, conferences also serve as a cost-effective way for NASA to carry out other mission-related purposes, such as educational outreach, program development, institutional planning, and information gathering. For example, conferences on program management provide opportunities for examination of current trends in aerospace project and engineering management by offering forums for the exchange and dissemination of best practices, new ideas, and training to help the Agency cost-effectively meet the toughest challenges in space exploration today.

Items specifically requested in your April 10 letter and included in this response are:

1. “A list of overnight conferences funded by the department and attended by more than 50 employees since January 1, 2005. For each conference provide date(s), location, cost, funding source, and the number of attendees.”

The enclosed listing identifies the conferences NASA has hosted or sponsored that were attended by 50 or more employees, along with the requested fields.

2. “The names, titles, and salaries of any individuals employed by the department to plan events.”

We have coordinated with NASA Centers and Headquarters Offices and, to the best of our knowledge, NASA does not employ any individuals with a job title of event planner. However, a variety of people may be involved on an ad hoc,

part-time basis to ensure the successful planning and execution of these conferences.

3. "Address any websites created to promote, track, or commemorate department conferences. IF the website is currently archived on the agency's intranet, provide an electronic copy?"

For each conference identified for item 1 of your request, URLs for all identified websites have also been included in the enclosed report.

Your follow-on letter of April 30, 2012 requested a list of any entities used by NASA to select sites for overnight conferences since 2005, and any documents or communications referring or relating to Location Solvers since January 1, 2009. Since 2005, site selection for NASA conferences is a role that has been reserved for civil servants. Starting in January 2009, NASA elevated the approval level to require an SES, SL or ST approver, and, since October 2012, NASA has required the selection be approved by a senior manager, an Official-in-Charge of a Headquarters Office or Center Director. With regard to your question regarding "Location Solvers," NASA's procurement records indicate that NASA has never had a contract or contractual relations with "Location Solvers." We additionally asked all Centers and Headquarters Offices to check local records for any use of Location Solvers, and none was found.

NASA has been steadily strengthening our conference sponsorship and attendance processes and we are currently implementing further improvements in our systems, processes, and reports. These measures are part of our continued efforts to be careful stewards of taxpayer dollars in carrying out our missions.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We would be pleased to respond to questions regarding this report.

Sincerely,



L. Seth Statler  
Associate Administrator  
for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs

Enclosure

cc:

The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member