

CONFERENCE PLANNING, EXECUTION, REPORTING, AND OVERSIGHT

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** This directive prescribes the policies, roles and responsibilities, and major requirements for Administration and Staff Office implementation of the conference planning, execution, reporting, and oversight within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:** This directive and associated handbook outline the principles, policies, and other key elements necessary to facilitate the implementation of VA-sponsored and co-sponsored conferences across the Department.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Management.
4. **RELATED HANDBOOK:** Conference Planning, Execution, Reporting, and Oversight Handbook 0632.
5. **RESCISSION:** None

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE
SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Stephen W. Warren
Executive in Charge and
Chief Information Officer
Office of Information and Technology

/s/
Helen Tierney
Executive in Charge, Office of Management,
and Chief Financial Officer

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1. PURPOSE. This directive and associated handbook provide guidance on planning, approving, and reporting of all VA-sponsored and co-sponsored conferences to ensure compliance with applicable Federal laws, regulations and policies; to ensure cost-effective conferences; and to mitigate the risk of inappropriate spending.

2. POLICY. A conference is defined as a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or event that involves attendee travel. The term conference also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404. Attendance at conferences must be for accomplishing VA's mission and for training. Conference requests must provide strong justification to support the need for a face-to-face event. This justification must identify tangible changes that may be implemented as a result of the conference that could not be achieved by implementing an alternative or more cost effective strategy (i.e. virtual meeting). Potential outcomes may include special processes, decisions, and/or skills that may be developed or gained to overcome current or future challenges VA faces.. The guidance in the associated handbook is applicable for VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences: 1) costing \$20,000 or greater; or 2) with 50 or more conference attendees, 1 or more of whom is a VA employee. For both conditions below, a Conference Certifying Official (CCO) and a Responsible Conference Executive (RCE), SES or SES equivalent, must be appointed:

a. For VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences costing \$20,000 or greater all processes outlined in the associated handbook are to be followed.

b. For VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences costing less than \$20,000 with 50 or more conference attendees, 1 or more of whom is a VA employee, the CCO and RCE must only complete the CCO and RCE appointment (Appendix B) and Final Conference Report (Appendix C). The other processes in the associated handbook may need to be followed based upon any changes that occur.

c. This directive applies to all VA employees except the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG). VA must comply with Public Law (P.L.) 112-154, Sec. 707, "Quarterly reports to Congress on Conferences Sponsored by the Department," P.L. 113-6, Sec. 517 and Sec. 3003, "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013," P.L. 113-46, Sec. 119, "Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014," and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) M-12-12, "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations," dated May 11, 2012. VA OIG will comply with OMB requirements and Congressional reporting requests.

d. For VA-sponsored conference costs exceeding \$500,000, the VA Web site must include the Secretary's waiver identifying the exceptional circumstances that necessitate exceeding this threshold. This is one of the requirements of reporting publicly to comply with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-12-12, "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations," dated May 11, 2012.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES. Ensure that all appropriate Administrations and Staff Offices are aware of their responsibilities for conference planning, execution, reporting and oversight.

a. **Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials** are responsible for ensuring appropriate due diligence is performed; that the business case for the event justifies the venue; and the use of VA resources (funds, time, and people) is appropriate. Additionally, the Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Other Key Officials are responsible for ensuring the CCO, the RCE, and all other planning personnel have taken the required training (i.e., purchase card training [TMS ID#5863] and travel card training [TMS ID#5508]) and adhered to published guidance. This authority may not be re-delegated.

b. **The Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction (OALC)** is responsible for VA's conference procurement activities through the Heads of Contracting Activity (HCA). The appropriate HCA is responsible for appointing a Contracting Officer (CO).

(1) The CO will appoint the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR).

(2) Only properly warranted COs can issue orders or make modifications to existing conference contracts and must complete any necessary modifications promptly. Modifications shall be made only when appropriate and within the overall spending limits identified in the event's approved Conference Package (CP).

c. **The CCO** is responsible for:

(1) The conference under his or her purview. The CCO must be familiar with the regulations and policy related to conferences. As the CCO, he or she must review and certify all conferences are in compliance with regulations and policy. Conferences are defined as VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences where costs to VA are \$20,000 or greater, or costing less than \$20,000 with 50 or more conference attendees, 1 or more of whom is a VA employee. Certification is accomplished by completing the Conference Certification Form prior to final review by the appropriate Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official.

(2) Ensuring that employees and supervisors involved in conference planning complete all mandatory and applicable training. This training includes mandatory annual VA-approved ethics training. Purchase card training (TMS ID#5863) and travel card training (TMS ID#5508) are also required for cardholders and approvers, as described in [VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 1](#) and [VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 2](#). (The CCO and RCE are equally responsible for ensuring mandatory training is completed.)

d. **The RCE** is responsible for:

(1) Developing the CP, executing conference activities, and reporting timely and accurately. The RCE must adhere to all applicable statutes, regulations, and policies when executing the approved conference. The RCE must exercise due diligence during the execution and reporting stages of each conference. Within 15 days of the conclusion of a conference costing \$20,000 or greater, the RCE must complete and submit a Post-Conference Certification Form to the Corporate Travel Reporting Office (CTRO). Within 30

days of conference conclusion, the RCE must also complete the Final Conference Report for conferences costing \$20,000 or greater, or conferences costing less than \$20,000, with 50 or more attendees, 1 or more of whom is a VA employee, and submit to CTRO. Further detail is available in the associated handbook.

(2) Ensuring that employees and supervisors involved in conference planning complete all mandatory and applicable training. This training includes mandatory annual VA-approved ethics training. Purchase card training (TMS ID#5863) and travel card training (TMS ID#5508) are also required for cardholders, as described in [VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 1](#) and [VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 2](#). (The CCO and RCE are equally responsible for ensuring mandatory training is completed.)

(3) Nominating a qualified COR

4. REFERENCES. This directive is governed by Public Law (P.L.) and other directives including:

a. [P.L. 112-154 "Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012," Sec. 707 \(38 United States Code \(U.S.C.\) Sec. 517 effective October 1, 2012\), which requires quarterly reports to Congress on conferences sponsored by the Department.](#)

b. [P.L. 113-6 "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013," Sec. 517,](#) which prohibits a Federal department or agency from using 2013 continuing appropriations funds to send more than 50 of its employees stationed within the U.S. to any single conference occurring outside the U.S.

c. [P.L. 113-6 "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013," Sec. 3003,](#) which requires submission of annual reports to the Inspector General regarding the costs and contracting procedures related to each conference held by an agency during fiscal year 2013, for which the cost was more than \$100,000, and within 15 days of the date of a conference for which costing was more than \$20,000.

d. [P.L. 113-46 "Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014," Sec. 119,](#) Section 3003 of division G of P.L. 113-6 shall be applied to funds appropriated by this joint resolution by substituting "fiscal year 2014" for "fiscal year 2013" each place it appears.

e. [38 U.S.C. Sec. 7471, "Designation of Regional Medical Education Centers."](#)

f. [5 CFR 410.404, "Determining if a conference is a training activity."](#)

g. [Federal Travel Regulation \(FTR\) Part 301-74, "Conference Planning."](#)

h. [OMB Memorandum M-12-12 \(citing FTR 300-3.1 and 301-74.2\), "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations."](#)

- i. [OMB Memorandum M-11-35, "Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government."](#)
- j. [VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV – Chapter 1, "Travel Administration."](#)
- k. [VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV – Chapter 2, "Travel Per Diem."](#)
- l. [VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV – Chapter 3, "Transportation Expenses."](#)
- m. [VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV – Chapter 10, "Conference Planning."](#)
- n. [VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XVI – Chapter 1, "Government Purchase Card."](#)
- o. [VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XVI – Chapter 2, "Government Travel Charge Card Program."](#)
- p. [VA Directive 6300, "Records and Information Management,"](#) and [VA Handbook 6300.1, "Records Management Procedures."](#)
- q. VA Handbook 0632, "Conference Planning, Execution, Reporting, and Oversight."

5. DEFINITIONS.

a. **Conference.** A meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel, and training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404. See 41 CFR Sec. 300-3.1.

b. **Conference Expenses.** All conference costs paid by the Government, whether paid directly by agencies or reimbursed by agencies to travelers or others associated with the conference, not including funds paid under Federal grants to grantees. Conference expenses include any associated authorized travel and per diem expenses, hire of rooms for official business, audiovisual and other equipment usage, light refreshments, registration fees, ground transportation, and other expenses as defined by the FTR. All outlays for conference preparation and planning should be included, but not the Federal employee time involved in conference preparation. See 41 CFR Sec. 301-74.2. Conference expenses should not include any fees or revenue received by the agency through the conference and should not include costs to ensure the safety of Government officials who are attending.

c. **Federal facility.** Property or building space owned, leased, or substantially controlled by the Federal Government or the government of the District of Columbia.

d. **Non-Federal facility.** Any facility that is not a Federal facility. State and local facilities are considered "non-Federal facilities." For further clarification see [5 U.S.C. 4101\(6\)](#).

e. **Waiver.** The agency head's approval in writing identifying the exceptional circumstances which necessitate exceeding the \$500,000 threshold of net expenses for an agency-sponsored and co-sponsored conference.