1001 OVERVIEW

This chapter establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) financial policies and procedures relating to conference planning, reporting, and oversight. The purpose of this chapter is to emphasize the need for proper planning and oversight of conferences, including associated travel. As defined by the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), a conference may include a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or event that involves attendee travel.¹

There are numerous Federal acquisition regulations, fiscal policies, and ethics laws that apply to Federal government conference planning, participation, reporting and oversight. This chapter articulates policy and provides guidance to implement and supplement those portions of the FTR pertaining to conference planning and congressional and OMB guidance on conference reporting. Refer to Appendix A for applicable FTR references for various subjects covered in this chapter.

1002 POLICIES

100201 GENERAL RULES.

A. VA approving officials will limit the authorization and payment of travel expenses to those that are necessary to accomplish the purpose of the conference. All conference travel will be performed in the most economical and effective manner and in accordance with the FTR and VA’s internal travel policy guidelines.

B. VA shall conduct sponsored and co-sponsored conference events at the most cost-effective location, considering such factors as per diem, transportation, and rental of conference rooms. A cost comparison of at least three (3) geographically-diverse and viable cities must be conducted to ensure that the conference will be held in the most economical location while achieving the objectives of the conference. (Note: site cost comparisons are not required when accomplishing a visit to a unique site.) Administrations and Staff Offices are responsible for conducting market research and determining customers’ needs. A contracting officer (CO) may be able to provide suggestions or guidance based on previous experience to assist in finding the most cost-effective conference facility. Refer to FTR Appendix E to Chapter 301 – Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning, for recommended guidance along with other factors to be considered when a conference is being developed.

C. VA Administrations and Staff Offices must analyze estimated conference expenditures for different locations to determine which location would provide the

¹ Training activities may also be considered a conference as determined by 5 CFR §410.404 “Determining if a conference is a training activity.”
overall best value to the Government. The organization responsible for planning the conference will ensure the standards for determining the best value are met. To determine expenditures, the conference planning organization will:

1. Assure there is appropriate management oversight of the conference planning process;

2. Conduct a cost comparison for the size, scope, and location of the proposed conference;

3. Maximize the use of Government-owned or Government-provided conference facilities to the maximum extent practicable;

4. Consider alternative modalities to meet conference objectives, e.g., teleconferencing; and

5. Maintain written documentation of the alternatives considered and the selection rationale used.

D. Site Selection.

1. When determining the best conference site in the interest of the Government, Responsible Conference Executive (RCE) will exercise strict fiscal responsibility to determine the best value. RCE is an individual assigned by an Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official responsible for the planning, approval, execution, and reporting of assigned VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences. RCE will ensure the following factors are considered when selecting a site for a conference: (Not applicable for site visit travel)

a. Management oversight is performed during the conference planning process;

b. Alternatives to a conference, such as teleconferencing, are considered before making any firm commitment on a physical location;

c. Agency representation is limited to the minimum number of attendees determined necessary to accomplish the purpose of the conference; and

d. Cities and venues are evaluated based on the various factors as outlined in FTR Appendix E to Chapter 301 – Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning.

2. Once the site is selected by the RCE, the RCE will consult with the CO in order to obtain the best value for the government at that selected site if a contract is awarded. The RCE will maintain written documentation of the evaluation criteria and the selection rationale used (reference FTR Part 301-74, “Conference Planning”). These records must be kept on file and made available for inspection by the Office of Inspector
General (OIG) or other interested parties, if requested. Refer to VA Form 10008a, Conference Cost Estimate and VA Form 10008b, Site Cost Comparison Chart, for determining which venue provides the best value to VA.

3. Contracting for Venues or Other Services Related to the Conference. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials may obtain conference planning services either through their own staff and resources, or through contracted third-party conference planners. Minimizing costs must be a critical consideration in this decision. For market research, VA has awarded mandatory Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs). The following are considerations for use of third-party conference support:

a. Conference-related costs, including supplies and services, must be purchased by authorized officials through appropriate procurement vehicles, such as purchase cards or contracts. Travel cards may be used only for travel-related expenditures incurred by individual travelers;

b. In general, the use of contract event planners is not advantageous because it can reduce VA’s control over conference expenses and can increase cost. If circumstances make the use of such a planner necessary, the contract with the planner must cover only the planning and logistical support provided by that vendor. A separate contract must be issued by a CO for all other conference-related expenses. The use of third-party contract planners does not eliminate the requirement for reporting total conference costs. The use of a third-party planner for assistance in site selection must be recommended by the CO and approved in advance by the RCE;

c. In accordance with OALC Information Letter (IL-049-02-12), “Legal and Technical Review of Proposed Contracts for Conferences,” all proposed contracts for conferences where VA’s commitment, expenditure, and liability combined exceed $25,000, require legal review by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) and technical review by Acquisition Assistance Division or Acquisition Program Management Division staff prior to signature by a CO;

d. The RCE must work closely with the CO and COR to ensure VA funds are spent in the most reasonable and efficient manner possible; and

e. For reimbursements, the CO and COR will reconcile payments against the contract terms and conditions. In the event VA has overpaid or underpaid, the COR is responsible for initiating the requests for corrective action, through the CO.

4. For conferences held in the District of Columbia, VA may not directly procure group lodging facilities for conference attendees. However, FTR §301-74.12(a) does not prohibit payment of per diem to an employee authorized to obtain lodging in the District of Columbia while performing official business travel.
5. While it is always desirable to obtain lodging consistent with the established lodging portion of the per diem rate for the chosen locality, it may not always be possible. In those instances when lodging is not available at the established per diem rate, travelers must construct a cost comparison of all associated costs, including the daily round-trip ground transportation costs to a lodging facility that meets the applicable per diem rate, and using the actual expense method at the conference locality as prescribed in the actual expense section of Volume XIV, Chapter 2, *Travel Per Diem*.

100202 MEALS AND INCIDENTAL EXPENSES (M&IE) WHEN ATTENDING A CONFERENCE.

If a meal is furnished by the Government at a conference, the employee is responsible for ensuring the appropriate meal deduction is made from the M&IE on the travel authorization. Refer to Volume XIV, Chapter 2, *Travel Per Diem*, for additional information on the M&IE rates for meals.

100203 LIGHT REFRESHMENTS AT CONFERENCES.

VA may provide light refreshments at approved conferences. The approving official must be conservative in the expense estimates for light refreshments. The provision of Government-provided light refreshments or complimentary snacks does not require reduction to the M&IE as these are not considered a “meal.” With very limited exceptions, refreshments should only be provided when a majority of the attendees are in travel status. Refer to Volume II, Chapter 4, *Awards, Ceremonies, Food and Refreshments, Gifts or Mementos* for additional information on refreshments at conferences.

100204 LEGAL AND TECHNICAL REVIEW.

All contracts for conferences, where VA’s commitment, expenditure, and liability combined exceed $25,000, require legal and technical review prior to signature by a VA CO. Refer to the Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management Information Letter 049-02-12, *Legal and Technical Review of Proposed Contracts for Conferences*, dated July 30, 2002.

1003 AUTHORITIES AND REFERENCES

100301 Government Employees Training Act (GETA)


100303 P.L. 113-76, “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014,” Title VII, Sec. 742


100306  38 U.S.C. §7471, “Designation of Regional Medical Education Centers”

100307  5 CFR §410.404, “Determining if a conference is a training activity”

100308  41 CFR Chapters 300-304, Federal Travel Regulations (FTR)

100309  Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)

100310  Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-12-12, “Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations”


100312  OMB Executive Order 13589, “Promoting Efficient Spending”

100313  FTR Bulletin 14-02, “Clarification of Agency Reporting Requirements for Conferences”

100314  VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume II – Chapter 4, “Awards, Ceremonies, Food or Refreshments, Gifts or Mementos”

100315  VA Office of Financial Policy Volume XIV Travel

100316  VA Office of Financial Policy Volume XVI Charge Card Programs

100317  VA Conference Resource Home

100318  OAMM Information Letter IL 049-02-12, Legal and Technical Review of Proposed Contracts for Conferences.

**1004 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

100401  The Assistant Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) oversees all financial management activities relating to the Department’s programs and operations, as required by the CFO Act of 1990 and 38 U.S.C. §309: Veterans’ Benefits. CFO-specific responsibilities include the direction, management, and provision of policy guidance and oversight of VA’s financial management personnel, activities, and operations. The CFO establishes financial policy, inclusive of travel,
systems, and operating procedures, for all VA financial entities and provides guidance on all aspects of financial management. Per VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV, Chapter 2, approving officials may approve per diem waivers up to 150 percent. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Finance may approve waivers for actual expense greater than 150 percent up to 300 percent for VACO Staff Office employees.

100402 Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, CFOs, Finance Officers, Chiefs of Finance Activities, Chief Accountants, and Other Key Officials are responsible for ensuring compliance with the policies and procedures in this chapter and designating one or more persons to answer questions pertaining to the planning and oversight of conferences. Under Secretaries and the Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals may authorize actual expense greater than 150 percent up to 300 percent for travelers under their jurisdiction. For conference planning and approval

Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials are responsible for:

A. Ensuring appropriate due diligence is performed;

B. Establishing internal processes, tools, procedures, and roles and responsibilities needed to comply with VA policies and the Conference Oversight and Reporting Knowledgebase (CORK);

C. Publishing supplemental processes and guidance, as applicable, to ensure program effectiveness;

D. Ensuring the business case for each VA-sponsored event justifies the use of VA resources (funds, time, and people);

E. Designating an RCE for sponsored and co-sponsored conferences and an EC (Executive Champion) for non-sponsored conferences;

F. Identifying purchase cardholder(s) to perform the transactions required for covered conferences, and ensuring the cardholder’s approving official is aware of the designation and has all required documentation prior to approving transactions;

G. Establishing procedures sufficient to ensure that each RCE and EC is properly trained for their conference duties; and

H. Providing an EC to manage attendance and overall approval for VA-wide employees at non-sponsored conferences for which the Administration or Staff Offices is the main proponent.

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2 Under Secretaries may delegate this authority to the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), Memorial Service Network (MSN) or Area Offices.
100403 The Office of Financial Policy (OFP), under the CFO’s direction, provides Department-wide financial policy and guidance. OFP is responsible for developing, coordinating, issuing, evaluating, and reviewing VA’s financial policies, to include those that impact financial systems, and procedures for compliance with all financial laws and regulations.

100404 The Corporate Travel and Reporting Office (CTRO), under the CFO’s direction, is responsible for tracking and reporting covered conferences. CTRO is responsible for:

A. Providing guidance and assistance to the Administrations and Staff Offices for conference approval requests to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies;

B. Tracking applicable conferences to ensure conference data elements for all reportable requirements are entered into CORK within the appropriate timeframe;

C. Delivering mandated reports: Congressionally-mandated and OMB-mandated reports;

D. Working closely with OFP to ensure VA conference policies and procedures are compliant with current laws and regulations;

E. Assisting with responses to Congressional and Freedom of Information Act inquiries;

F. Managing CORK; and

G. Delegating approval and reporting requirements for cross-Administration and Staff Office participation at non-VA-sponsored conferences in the event Administrations and Staff Offices are unable to identify the main proponent of the conference.

100405 Approving officials will ensure all travel is authorized and performed consistent with the FTR, VA travel policy, and any other agency-specific guidance relating to travel issues. Additionally, they could have pecuniary liability for erroneous payments resulting from their negligent or fraudulent actions. Their roles include:

A. Authorizing only official travel for travelers under their jurisdiction in advance of the travel;

B. Determining if the travel is essential for the purpose of carrying out the mission of VA;

C. Ensuring adequate funds are available before authorizing travel;

D. Ensuring all travel is performed in the most economical and effective manner;
E. Ensuring VA’s E-Gov Travel Service (ETS) is used to prepare, process, approve, and route travel authorizations and vouchers for official TDY travel, (including when travelers are making their own transportation and lodging reservations);

F. Examining expense reports to ensure the justification, documentation of the conference date, and receipts are attached, to ensure that travel expenses for which reimbursement is claimed were made as authorized, and that split-pay was used to pay for all authorized expenses made to the government travel card;

G. Ensuring travelers under their jurisdiction complete Standard Form 3881, Automated Clearing House (ACH) Vendor/Miscellaneous Payment Enrollment Form and submit to VAFSC Vendorizing Team group mailbox to receive travel advances and reimbursements electronically, file expense reports with electronically attached receipts, and comply with the travel card program guidelines; and

H. Approving requests based on the established conference oversight and approval threshold found in section 1005 of this policy.

100406 Travelers will:

A. Be knowledgeable of the FTR, VA travel policy, and any other agency-specific guidance related to travel and conference issues;

B. Minimize costs of official travel by exercising the same care when incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if on personal travel and expending personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, delays, or luxury accommodations and services that are not necessary or justified in the performance of official business are not acceptable under this policy. Travelers are responsible for excess costs incurred for personal preference or convenience;

C. Ensure travel is authorized by the approving official prior to departure;

D. Arrange travel using VA’s ETS, including reservations for transportation, lodging, and rental vehicles;

E. In the event that travel plans change and conference attendance is cancelled:

1. Cancel transportation and lodging reservations in a timely manner;

2. Seek a refund of the registration fee and repay VA with any refund received if an advance was paid; and

3. Repay VA if no refund is made and failure to attend is due to inexcusable reasons.
F. Claim and obtain, where applicable, lodging tax exemptions. See U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) SmartPay website for applicable locations and use certificates granted by the locality;

G. Submit claims for expense reimbursement within 5 business days upon return to the official station. For travelers in an extended travel status (more than 30 days), submit expense reports monthly. For local expense reports, submit at least quarterly; and

H. Comply with VA’s Travel Charge Card Program guidance contained in Volume XVI, Chapter 2, Travel Charge Card.

100407 The Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction (OALC) is responsible for VA’s conference procurement activities through the Heads of Contracting Activity (HCA) for VA conference sponsorship or hosting. The appropriate HCA is responsible for appointing a Contracting Officer (CO).

A. The CO will ensure negotiations are conducted and documented in accordance with the FAR.

B. The CO will appoint the Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR).

C. 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.

100408 The RCE for internal VA-sponsored conferences is responsible for developing the conference package (CP) for conference sponsorship and hosting, overseeing conference activities, and providing timely and accurate reporting.

100409 The EC for external VA non-sponsored conferences is responsible for conference sponsorship and attendance of VA employees at non-VA-sponsored conferences.

1005 PROCEDURES

For VA-sponsored and co-sponsored conferences, the conference process includes planning, approval, oversight, and reporting. For VA non-sponsored conferences, the conference process includes planning, approval, and oversight.
A. PLANNING AND APPROVAL.

1. OMB Memorandum M-12-12 requires the Deputy Secretary (DEPSECVA) to initiate review of planned spending for every upcoming VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conference where net conference expense by VA will exceed $100,000. In an effort to streamline conference approval processes, VA combines the planning and approval activities into one step.

2. The Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials may delegate to their executives the authority to appoint the RCE and may designate administrative support agents for the RCE. The RCE function can be accomplished by general schedule-level employees.

3. Planning and approval includes preparation, routing, and approval of CPs for VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences, including the development of the business case and guidance for planning and oversight of the conference. The RCE will certify CPs for VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences. Approval authorities vary depending on the expected cost of the conference (see Table 1: Approval Authorities Thresholds).

Table 1: Approval Authorities Thresholds (Internal Conferences)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs to VA</th>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ $100K</td>
<td>RCE</td>
<td>Delegated to the Under/Assistant Secretary and Other Key Official, who may further delegate</td>
<td>Delegated to the Under/Assistant Secretary and Other Key Official, who may further delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100K &lt; x ≤ $500K</td>
<td>RCE</td>
<td>Under/Assistant Secretary or Other Key Official</td>
<td>DEPSECVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $500K</td>
<td>RCE</td>
<td>Under/Assistant Secretary or Other Key Official</td>
<td>Secretary (SECVA) (waiver)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials must submit a CP for conferences costing in excess of $100,000, to the DEPSECVA or SECVA, as applicable, no later than 45 calendar days prior to the date funds are to be obligated, or no later than 70 calendar days prior to the start of the conference, whichever is earlier. The DEPSECVA’s written approval or SECVA’s waiver is required before VA can incur any conference obligations. The following documents (including any special waivers or background information) must be submitted in the request (see Appendix B):

a. VA Form 0907, Strategic Communication Review;

b. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet; and
c. VA Form 10008a, Conference Cost Estimate.

5. The RCE is responsible for:

   a. Securing the proper administrative approvals for VA conference sponsorship, hosting, and employee attendance;

   b. Ensuring cost estimates are reasonable. Per Diem estimates will be based on GSA Per Diem Rates for the locality found at the GSA website. Attendance will be an estimate of participants based on identified interest and on accommodation of subsequently identified individuals. The RCE should allow for late additions, as presenters and other selections are likely to occur after event approval;

   c. For local area per diem considerations, see VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV – Chapter 2, “Travel Per Diem”. Note: SECVA approval is required for any local area per diem authorizations;

   d. Reviewing and certifying that the conference is in compliance with regulations and policy; and

   e. Developing the CP for approval.

6. Calculation of Conference Costs Estimates. Overall conference cost estimates should be rounded to the nearest thousand. Total conference cost estimates include all direct and indirect expenses paid by VA including but not limited to:

   a. Travel costs for attendees, speakers, panelists, etc. (e.g., transportation, lodging, meals, incidental expenses, and travel management fees);

   b. Rental of rooms for official business (e.g., meeting rooms, banquet halls), audiovisual equipment including computer access fees (internet costs), and light refreshments or meals;

   c. Printing costs. Every effort should be made to provide event materials to participants electronically or via print-on-demand services/options. Printed materials should minimize paper usage (printing on both sides) and minimize higher cost options (gray scale versus color printing) where possible;

   d. Registration fees and administrative costs (including contract planner fees); and

   e. Conference facilitator, trainer or instructor fees.

7. Conference Package (CP). The RCE develops the CP and completes all required forms for conferences in excess of $100,000. Electronically captured and digitally verified signatures are acceptable on all CPs and reporting forms. The RCE must
certify the CP and route for approvals as required by Table 1 in this policy. See Appendix B for the CP required forms and the conference resource intranet site for examples of sample CPs.

8. Co-location and Facilities. The RCE should make every effort to host or sponsor conferences in facilities controlled by the Government in order to reduce costs. 


13. Gifts, Trinkets, Memorabilia, Commemorative Items (also known as SWAG). Handouts, gifts, trinkets, memorabilia and other commemorative items such as hats, mugs, portfolios, t-shirts, coins, gift bags, etc. must not be purchased with VA funds, regardless of whether they include the event name or VA logo. See VA Financial Policies and Procedures Volume II – Chapter 4, “Awards, Ceremonies, Food or Refreshments, Gifts or Mementos.”

A. Employees should not accept individual gifts unless authorized under the ethics regulations or the FTR. Gifts that are prohibited include travel and lodging for site visits used for familiarization of a potential conference site, or under other circumstances.

B. Occasionally, VA may be offered special rates or benefits; consult the OGC’s Ethics section to clarify what may be accepted and what may not be accepted.

14. Site Visits. The RCE must approve all conference-related site visits, which may be authorized only when information cannot be obtained by other means.

15. International Conferences. VA employees traveling to conferences outside the United States must comply with VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XIV – Chapter 6, “International Travel.”
B. OVERSIGHT.

1. VA is committed to accurately tracking VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conference expenditures and ensuring appropriate internal controls.

2. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials must ensure their budget officers are fully integrated into the decision process during all three phases to ensure fiscal discipline.

3. The RCE is responsible for:

   a. Ensuring the proper approvals for each conference are received, costs are documented, and total expenses do not exceed the approved costs;

   b. Ensuring all approvals and CP documentation is uploaded into CORK once conference is approved. This includes all VA forms that may not necessarily be required for the conference approval request, but support the conference approval decision for future audit purposes (see Appendix B);

   c. Notifying the approving authority, prior to conference execution, if budgetary thresholds are crossed or require additional approval;

   d. Ensuring the updated budget or actual costs do not exceed the approved conference expenses. When the updated budget amount or actual costs exceed the approved expenditure by five percent or more, the RCE must notify the official who approved the original conference package of the increase, and provide justification.

   e. Exercising due diligence during conference planning and approval (e.g., requiring prior approval of any conference-related expenditure, including any use of purchase cards);

   f. Informing all employees involved with the conferences of prohibitions against soliciting or receiving any gifts or gratuities from outside entities. See VA Financial Policies and Procedures Volume XIV – Chapter 9 "Non-Federal Source Funding (Donated Travel)." RCE should consult with OGC (Ethics) for advice;

   g. Issuing "Instructions- to-Travelers" (ITT) timely to all conference attendees that provide guidance on compliance with the FTR. This includes VA’s travel policy requirement of not to incur hotel taxes in states that offer tax exemption to the Government, and reduced per diem for meals that are provided by the Government or other conference sponsors. The ITT will also include the requirement for travelers and approving officials to include a cost comparison when choosing to use a privately-owned vehicle instead of a Government-contracted mode of transportation;

   h. Ensuring the conference complies with applicable statutes, regulations, and policies;
i. Identifying and clearly communicating all conference requirements to the CO. A warranted CO will be responsible for the acquisition of services and supplies over $3,000 to ensure acquisitions in support of conferences are planned and managed in accordance with applicable regulations. The COR must inspect and accept or reject all deliverables. VA has awarded mandatory BPAs for event planning and support services (ESS). For conference planning and support, VA developed a comprehensive Customer Ordering Guide to assist VA offices in preparing required documentation to order ESS. Warranted COs may place orders against the BPAs by following the electronic contract management system procedures detailed in the guide;

j. Ensuring VA does not solicit lodging accommodation upgrades as part of contracts. The CO must obtain a technical and legal review of all proposed contracts with hotels or similar facilities for conferences where VA’s cost may exceed $25,000;

k. Ensuring VA does not incur expenditures for the use of entertainment (videos, music, etc.), motivational speakers, the purchase of promotional items, or embossing, or otherwise imprinting, the name of the organization or event on any supplies, mementos, or other handouts;

l. Ensuring the CO or government purchase cardholder makes all purchases within the limits of their individual authority, and only authorized contracting personnel make commitments or changes that affect price, quality, quantity, delivery or other terms and conditions of a contract;

m. Ensuring that no purchases are made without appropriate approvals. Above $3,000, the CO determines the best vehicle for purchases. Below $3,000, the RCE must designate a purchase cardholder to perform the transaction, ensure the cardholder’s approving official is aware of the designation, and has all required documentation prior to approving transactions. The purchase cardholder must have RCE approval prior to purchase. See VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 1, “Government Purchase Card,” regarding the approving official’s responsibility to certify all transactions made by cardholders and ensure applicable documentation is maintained for 6 years and 3 months;

n. Nominating a qualified COR for conferences;

o. Serving as the senior official on-site during the execution of the conference. However, the RCE may delegate to an appropriately qualified person the duties of on-site oversight;

p. Updating CORK should there be any event changes or cancellation;
q. Determining appropriate on-site conference support personnel before, during, and after a conference. These individuals are identified by name and the designation must be provided to these travelers for inclusion in their travel receipts; and

r. Ensuring that employees and supervisors involved in conference oversight complete all mandatory and applicable training, which includes mandatory annual VA-approved ethics training and travel card training (TMS ID#5508). For Purchase Card Holders, purchase card training (TMS ID#5863) is required as described in VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 1 and VA Financial Policy, Volume XVI, Chapter 2.

C. REPORTING.

1. After the conference takes place, the RCE is responsible for:

a. Preparing the Post-Conference Certification Form and Final Conference Report identifying planned-versus-actual cost and including previously provided justifications and any re-approval. If the actual cost exceeds the approved budget by more than five percent, the RCE is responsible in providing notifications to the appropriate approving authority.

b. Submitting VA Form 10089b Post-Conference Certification Form within 15 days of conference conclusion. This can be accomplished by entering the Post-Conference Certification Form data into CORK;

c. Submitting VA Form 10089a Final Conference Report within 45 days of conference conclusion. This can be accomplished by entering the Final Conference Report form data into CORK; and 2. CTRO uses CORK to generate reports to Congress, the OIG, and to post on VA’s public website.

a. In order to ensure visibility of conferences that require reporting, Administrations and Staff Offices must ensure CORK data is updated timely.

b. Administrations and Staff Offices will update CORK with all conference event title information no later than 15 days prior to the beginning of the next fiscal quarter. This update must ensure that the next quarter’s planned conference event titles and estimates are as refined as possible; the update must also include any additional conferences that have been planned and a status change for any conferences that have been cancelled.

c. Administrations and Staff Offices will ensure that all post-conference reporting is completed in CORK for each event by required completion dates.
Table 2: VA Conference Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs to VA</th>
<th>Frequency of Statutory Reporting</th>
<th>Reported to</th>
<th>Time Frame for Statutory Reporting</th>
<th>Frequency of OMB Posting Requirement</th>
<th>Time Frame for OMB Posting Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥ $20K or ≥ 50 attend, including 1+ from VA</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>NLT 30 days after the end of the quarter</td>
<td>Posting not required</td>
<td>Posting not required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $20K</td>
<td>As it occurred</td>
<td>Inspector General</td>
<td>NLT 15 days of the date after a conference</td>
<td>Posting not required</td>
<td>Posting not required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $100K</td>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>Public and Inspector General</td>
<td>NLT 30 days after the end of the calendar year</td>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>January 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. 38 U.S.C. §517
3. OMB Memorandum 12-12
4. No statutory time requirement for reporting conferences >$100K.

3. Reports to Congress.

a. Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal quarter, VA provides a quarterly report on covered conferences.

b. Reports to Congress shall include total estimated costs to VA for conferences occurring during the fiscal quarter in which the report is submitted, and an accounting of the final costs to VA of each conference occurring during the previous fiscal quarter. This includes the following types of costs:

i. per diem payments;
ii. miscellaneous and incidental expenses (M&IE, part of per diem);
iii. lodging (part of per diem);
iv. transportation and parking;
v. other travel expenses;
vi. refreshments (food and beverage);
vii. rental of halls, auditoriums, or other spaces;
viii. rental of equipment and services (audio visual);
ix. entertainment (although permitted by law, this is prohibited by VA policy);
x. contractors’ support; and
xi. brochures or other printed media and distribution.

a. To comply with OMB Memorandum 12-12, VA reports on the VA public website for each conference sponsored by VA during the prior fiscal year where U.S. Government appropriated funds were expended in excess of $100,000. The reports include:

i. the total conference expenses incurred by the agency for the conference;
ii. the location of the conference;
iii. the date of the conference;
iv. a brief explanation regarding how the conference advanced the mission of the Department; and
v. the total number of individuals whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the Department.

b. The website includes the SECVA’s waiver identifying the exceptional circumstances for any instances where conference net expenses exceeded $500,000.

c. The website includes information about fiscal year conference net expenses, as well as a general report about conference activities throughout the fiscal year.

5. Reports to Inspector General.

a. To comply with P.L. 113-6, “Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013,” P.L. 113-46, “Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014,” and P.L. 113-76, “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014” Title VII §742, personnel from VA’s OIG have access to CORK view information about conferences that have been completed. The RCE uses CORK to record post-conference data elements.

b. VA submits an annual report to the OIG for conferences in excess of $100,000. The report includes:

i. a description of the conference’s purpose;
ii. the number of participants attending; and
iii. a detailed statement of the costs to VA, including:

- food and beverages;
- audio-visual equipment and services;
- employee or contractor travel to and from the conference; and
- a discussion of method used to determine which costs relate to the conference; and

iv. a description of the contracting procedures used, including:

- whether contracts were awarded on a competitive basis; and
- a discussion of any cost comparison conducted by the departmental component or office in evaluating potential contractors for the conference.
10052 NON VA-SPONSORED CONFERENCES.

A. PLANNING AND APPROVAL.

1. The Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials may delegate the authority to appoint an EC to their executives. The EC function can be accomplished by general schedule-level employees. The Administration may designate administrative support agents for the EC.

Table 3: Approval Authorities Thresholds (External Conferences)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs to VA</th>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Approval</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ $100K</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Delegated to the Under/Assistant Secretary and Other Key Official, who may further delegate</td>
<td>Delegated to the Under/Assistant Secretary and Other Key Official, who may further delegate</td>
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<tr>
<td>$100K &lt; x ≤ $500K</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Under/Assistant Secretary or Other Key Official</td>
<td>DEPSECVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $500K</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Under/Assistant Secretary or Other Key Official</td>
<td>Secretary (SECVA) (waiver)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

2. Conferences Between $100,000 and $500,000. The Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials shall submit an annual request to the DEPSECVA for all non-sponsored conferences in the upcoming fiscal year costing between $100,000 and $500,000. This request must be received no later than 70 calendar days prior to the start of the first scheduled event. Any events not included in the annual requests must be managed as individual emergent requests for DEPSECVA approval.

a. The annual conference request list must include the following data elements:

i. fiscal quarter;
ii. sponsoring office;
iii. hosting organization;
iv. total estimated costs of all external events in the previous fiscal year;
v. conference title;
vi. known or estimated date;
vii. location;
viii. projected number of attendees;
ix. estimated travel costs;
xi. estimated registration fees; and
xii. estimated total cost for maximum VA funding requested.

The DEPSECVA’s approval or SECVA’s approval/waiver is required before VA can incur any conference obligations.
3. Conferences Over $500,000. The EC develops individual conference waiver and justification requests for SECVA for conferences estimated to cost over $500,000.

4. The EC is responsible for securing the proper administrative approvals for attendance of VA employees at non VA-sponsored conferences.

5. Occasionally, VA may be offered special rates or benefits - consult the OGC’s Ethics section to clarify what may be accepted and what may not be accepted.

B. OVERSIGHT

The EC is responsible for ensuring the proper approvals for each conference are received from DEPSECVA as part of the annual approval request or as an emergent event.

Every effort must be made to ensure the updated budget or actual costs do not exceed the approved conference expenses. When the updated budget amount or actual costs exceed the approved expenditure by five percent or more, EC must notify the officials who approved the original conference package of the increase and provide justification.

C. REPORTING

While Congressional reporting is not required by law, the Administrations and Staff Offices are responsible for ensuring a final list of approved attendees is available upon request.

1006 DEFINITIONS

100601 Conferences. 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.

100602 Covered Conference. A VA sponsored or co-sponsored event that costs at least $20,000 or has 50 or more attendees of which at least one (1) is a VA employee.

100603 Employee. An appointed officer or employee of an agency, including a special Government employee. This definition also includes an individual employed intermittently in the Government service as an expert or consultant and paid on a daily when-actually-employed basis, and an individual serving without pay or at a $1 a year (also referred to as “invitational traveler”).

100604 Executive Champion. An individual assigned by an Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official responsible for the planning and approval, of assigned VA non-sponsored conferences.
100605 FTR. The FTR implements statutory requirements and Executive branch policies for travel by Federal civilian employees and others authorized to travel at Government expense.

100606 Per Diem. The per diem allowance (also referred to as subsistence allowance) is a daily payment instead of reimbursement for actual expenses for lodging, meals, and related incidental expenses. The per diem allowance is distinguished from transportation expenses and other miscellaneous travel expenses. The per diem allowance covers all charges and services, including any service charges where applicable. Lodging taxes in the United States are excluded from the per diem allowance and are reimbursed as a miscellaneous expense. In foreign locations, lodging taxes are part of the per diem allowance and are not a miscellaneous expense.

100607 Responsible Conference Executive. An individual assigned by an Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official responsible for the planning, approval, execution, and reporting of assigned VA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences.

100608 Retreat. A town hall type meeting for government employees to review progress and challenges in implementing Government or Departmental policies, engaging their staff in discussing various aspects of said Government or Departmental activities. Retreats are often held off site or away from the normal duty station or office. Such a facility usually offers participants the opportunity to socialize to a greater extent than they otherwise would in the office, and to personalize relationships and gain greater appreciation of each other.

100609 Seminar. A lecture or presentation delivered to an audience on a particular topic or set of topics that are educational in nature. It is usually held for groups of 10-50 individuals. A seminar is frequently held at a hotel meeting space or within an office conference room.

100610 Symposium. A meeting of a number of experts in a particular field at which papers are presented by specialists on particular subjects and discussed with a view to making recommendations concerning the problems under discussion.

100611 Training. An activity leading to skilled behavior. Training also refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies as a result of the teaching of vocational or practical skills and information that relate to specific useful competencies.

100612 Traveler. An individual as defined by the FTR who is authorized to perform official Government travel.

100613 Workshop. A series of educational and work sessions. Small groups of people meet together over a short period of time to concentrate on a defined area of concern. Purposes for workshops may vary; examples include: Informing, problem solving, and
training. Typically, a workshop has two components: technical, in which one presents theory in lectures and readings, and one in which one would do a project, produce a product, or write a paper.

1007 RESCISSIONS


1008 QUESTIONS

Questions concerning these financial policies and procedures should be directed to the offices mailboxes found in the VA Global Address List:

VHA VHA Travel Card
VBA VAVBAWAS/CO/FINREP
NCA NCA Budget Service
CTRO VA CTRO - Inbox

1009 REVISIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Effective Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>Incorporated streamlined VA Directive and Handbook 0632, Conference Planning, Execution, Reporting, and Oversight.</td>
<td>CTRO/APS</td>
<td>March 2015</td>
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<td>Chapter References</td>
<td>FTR References</td>
<td>Subject Descriptions</td>
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<td>100201</td>
<td>301-74 Subpart A</td>
<td>Agency Responsibilities</td>
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<td>100201B</td>
<td>Appendix E to Chapter 301</td>
<td>Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>100201D</td>
<td>301-74.5 and 301-74.14</td>
<td>Site Selection</td>
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<td>301-74.12</td>
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<td>100201D4</td>
<td>301-74.6</td>
<td>Cost Comparison</td>
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<td>100202</td>
<td>301-74.21</td>
<td>M&amp;IE When Attending a Conference</td>
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<td>100203</td>
<td>301-74.7</td>
<td>Light Refreshment at Conferences</td>
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APPENDIX B: CONFERENCE RELATED FORMS

Please review VA Conference Resource Home intranet page for conference related forms procedures not covered in this policy.

1. RCE must submit the following standard Conference Package forms to DEPSECVA or SECVA for VA-Sponsored and Co-Sponsored Conferences in excess of $100,000:
   a. VA Form 0907, Strategic Communication Review
   b. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet
   c. VA Form 10008a, Conference Cost Estimate

2. RCE must use the following standard Conference Package forms for planning VA-Sponsored and Co-Sponsored Conferences and upload into CORK:
   a. VA Form 10008b, Site Cost Comparison Chart
   b. VA Form 10008d, Conference Certification Form

3. EC must submit the following standard Annual Approval Request forms for Non-VA-Sponsored Conferences between $100,000 and $500,000:
   a. VA Form 0907, Strategic Communication Review
   b. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet
   c. VA Form 10090a, Annual External Conference Concept and Approval Plan

4. EC must submit the following standard Approval Request forms to SECVA for Non-VA-Sponsored Conferences in excess of $500,000:
   a. VA Form 0907, Strategic Communication Review
   b. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet
   c. VA Form 10008a, Conference Cost Estimate

5. RCE must submit the following Post-Conference Reports for VA-Sponsored and Co-Sponsored Covered Conferences:
   a. VA Form 10089b, Responsible Conference Executive (RCE) Post-Conference Certification Form
   b. VA Form 10089a, Final Conference Report

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3 For conferences $100,000 or less, Administrations and Staff Offices must submit internally-approved Conference Packages.
4 These forms, or their equivalent, can be accomplished by entering requisite data into CORK