



## MEMORANDUM

To: DBC and DOE Conference Reporting POCs

CC Conference and Travel Councils

From: Jan Hennessey

Subject: DOE Conference Reporting Update

Date: October 16, 2013

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In addition to LBNL's previous guidelines based on the December 6, 2012 memo on Conference Related Activities and Spending, we have some important updates and recommendations to share with you.

### **Contract Modification**

Based on DOE guidance, the Berkeley Site Office (BSO) Contracting Officer has added a new clause to LBNL's contract that is effective immediately. Clause H.49 – *Conference Spending Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act. 2013 For Management and Operating Contracts (May 2013)* - outlines 6 areas of compliance and applies further constraints to conference activities and spending:

1. Conference costs will be allowable only if the conference is directly and programmatically related to the purpose of the contract.
2. The Lab must follow all the current guidance issued by DOE and report, as instructed through the Conference Management tool (iPortal).
3. While DOE may approve a conference, only the Contracting Officer has authority to determine if the costs are allowable, allocable, and reasonable.
4. The Lab, sponsors, hosts and attendees must aggressively seek to limit costs associated with a conference.
5. The Lab must ensure its conference attendees conduct themselves with the highest level of professionalism.
6. The Contracting Officer will ensure conference activities are included in the Lab's annual audit plan.

### **DOE Conference Reporting Changes**

After an extensive review, DOE announced some changes aimed at streamlining the reporting process. They recognize that scientific and technical conferences are critical to success in accomplishing DOE's mission. The changes are intended to continue appropriate scrutiny while allowing participation in important professional and industry meetings. The changes are in three areas:

1. Authority for approving conferences under \$500k will be delegated to Under Secretaries. This means packages between \$100k-\$500k will no longer need Deputy Secretary approval and will be processed more quickly.
2. Information collected in iPortal has been streamlined. Ten fields are no longer required. Most of them have to do with hosted conferences, but one big change is that registration costs will be added to total travel cost. We will no longer have to break out registration separately.
3. Recurring, non-DOE sponsored conferences (like professional society conferences) which fall below \$500k in net expenses may be pre-approved. DOE will issue quarterly lists of pre-approved conferences. The labs will be able to add up to a threshold of \$450k. This will speed up the process considerably for conferences that fall into this category. We have already had one such pre-approved conference announced, ARPA-E., and DOE is working on the first list.

We are currently writing official Lab policy on DOE Conference Reporting. It will include these most recent changes.

#### **Notes for Divisions from Conference Services**

1. Plan as far in advance as possible using comfortable, rounded estimates.
2. Continue to ensure funds are not committed prior to DOE approval - or a determination that approval is not required – even if the cost is refundable.
3. Hosted conferences must be reported if they meet the definition of a conference.
4. Exemptions for conferences attended by Lab staff or for hosted conferences can be included on your spreadsheet with dates and location and the reason for the exemption entered in the description. In any case, you need to keep a record and reason for the exemption.
5. Conference naming is critical to the process. Encourage the use of the official name from the conference website, with acronyms, year or other numbers listed at the end. Do not use hyphens.
6. Enter an early registration date as soon as it is available. This field will be added to the spreadsheet.
7. Co-located conferences must be treated as one.
8. Monetary support/sponsorship paid with DOE funds for Lab or non-Lab conferences must be reported. Justification for the support can be listed in the description or in the body of the email. This funding is entered into the iPortal tool and counts towards the net DOE expense.
9. Non-employees (including sub-contractors) attending a conference on our behalf need to be reported. More details will be provided through procurement and in the forthcoming DOE Conference Reporting policy.
10. Conferences Services should be notified whenever a conference attendee cancels; and the division is responsible for canceling the trip in TREX.
11. Expense reports for conference attendance need to use “conference” as the business purpose and use the official name of the conference as listed on the website. Even if it is a multi-leg trip, use conference as the business purpose.
12. Expense reports for conference attendance must be completed within 30 days after the conference. If the trip had multiple legs, it would be very helpful for reporting actuals if a note was included explaining the cost split.

13. Each division was assigned a point of contact (POC) within Conference Services to provide better service. Divisions were asked to send requests weekly unless the request was urgent. The following is our working definition of “urgent”:
  - a. A new request for a conference that is occurring within two weeks for domestic/60 days for foreign.
  - b. A senior scientist/leader was just invited to speak or attend.
  - c. A quick question that does not require extensive research.
  - d. An error was made on a submission which needs to be corrected.
14. We have received recent information about “Invitational Travel– Payment of Travel Expenses of Persons Who Are Not Government Employees”. More approvals may be necessary. Discuss any plans to support travel expenses of non-employees at conferences with Conference Services before reporting. We will follow up with further guidance on this issue.

### **Conferences Services Updates**

After extensive system analysis, documentation, discussion and cost estimates, we’ve concluded that modifying our current TREX and Event Database systems, or developing a new standalone system for DOE Conference Reporting, is cost-prohibitive until we tackle travel and conferences in F\$M Phase IIB. We will have to turn our attention to strengthening our existing processes and identifying low cost process improvement alternatives.

To support this effort, we have created a Conference Services analyst position and will hire someone with policy, analytic and technical skills to help us with our systems and processes. This new position will be instrumental in looking for new ways to handle conference reporting, as well as improving policies, documentation and on-line resources. As a result of this change, Kathy Day will transition out of Conference Services and into another administrator position within the OCFO. We wish Kathy the very best!

The Berkeley Lab Events Policy was modified in September and a memo was sent to all the members of our Conference Council. The memo is attached along with the FY14 per diem list. The two key changes in the policy relate to on-site and off-site allowable food costs and a 3 hour minimum for events to qualify. As mentioned above, this policy is being revised to include DOE Conference Reporting.

Jan Hennessey

Conference Services Manager