UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
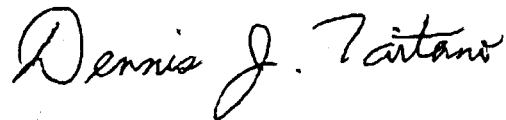Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

For: FSA Offices

FSA Conference Policy, Approval Procedures, and Reporting Requirements

Approved by: Acting Administrator

Dennis J. Taitano

1 Overview

A Background

DM 2300-001 published on May 1, 2008, is the primary source for the USDA's policy about managing temporary duty travel. The Agriculture Travel Regulation (ATR) supplements 41 CFR Chapter 301 and Appendix E to Chapter 301 issued by GSA. The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) is available at www.gsa.gov under the "Policy & Regulations" tab.

ATR requires agencies to submit all proposals to conduct events, conferences and training, which have a total agency cost in excess of $40,000 to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) for prior approval. Agencies are required to submit quarterly conference/training attendee data to CFO within 1 month of the quarter's end.

In addition, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246) requires the Secretary to prepare a report by September 30 each year, on conferences with costs greater than $10,000 sponsored by USDA or attended by USDA employees.

Agency reports to the Secretary shall be made through CFO and contain the following for each conference for which USDA awarded a procurement contract:

- name, location, and date of the conference
- number of USDA employees attending
- costs, including travel expenses.

Note: Conferences held in USDA facilities are **not** required to be included in the Conference Report.

Disposal Date	Distribution
May 1, 2010	All FSA Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

1   Overview (Continued)

B   Purpose

This notice provides guidance on the following:

- planning FSA-sponsored conferences
- requesting approval for FSA conference or training event
- establishing a system for reporting annual and quarterly conference data to CFO.

2   Planning Policy

A   Definitions

A <u>meeting sponsor</u> is the program area's primary contact for the conference or training event. The meeting sponsor will coordinate with the FSA meeting planner to select conference locations and evaluate cost estimates.

A <u>conference</u> is a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, event, or training that involves attendee travel.

For official travel purposes, <u>resort area</u> includes named resorts, spas, gambling centers, and other recreational establishments, ski resorts, beach areas, and locations known for their emphasis on tourist type activities.

Note: Use of resort areas is discouraged and requires a detailed analysis for consideration.

B   FSA-Sponsored Conferences

The following applies to FSA-sponsored conferences.

- Meeting planners must follow ATR and FTR policy when planning conferences.

- All conferences costing more than $100,000 in total expenses, including travel, lodging, meeting facility, etc., will require the approval of the Secretary.

- All conferences costing more than $40,000 in total expenses, including travel, lodging, meeting facility, etc., must be submitted for approval to OCFO.

- All conferences with total cost between $20,000 and $40,000 must be approved by the Under Secretary for FFAS.

- All National Office FSA-sponsored conferences with a total cost less than $20,000 must be approved by the FSA Administrator.

- All State FSA-sponsored conferences with a total cost between $10,000 and $20,000 must be approved by DAFO.

  Note: For conferences under $10,000, States shall comply with the requirements on the Conference Event Request form (Exhibit 1).

2   Planning Policy (Continued)

B   FSA-Sponsored Conferences (Continued)

- For all conference requests, FSA meeting planners will prepare a comparative location cost analysis for potential locations **before** choosing a site. Include the following in the analysis:

  - cost factors for transportation and lodging

    Note: States honoring the Federal Tax Exemption status should be the primary consideration for a conference site.

  - accessibility of facility

  - availability of local interpreters

  - transportation for individuals with disabilities

  - local meal costs

  - rental of conference rooms.

  Notes: When the lowest cost location is not chosen as the meeting site, document the reasons for choosing an alternative location. Document other extenuating factors (such as the need to be located near FSA's Kansas City complex for use of computer facility), and use 3 reasonable sites for a cost comparison (such as sites with comparable computer facilities).

  Regardless of cost, do **not** hold conferences in facilities that are not accessible to participants with disabilities.

- FSA meeting sponsor shall choose conference locations with the primary consideration being total conference cost; including lodging, transportation, meeting space rental, audio visual equipment, and food. For FSA-sponsored conferences use the following facilities as listed in order of preference:

  - local USDA facilities; which include FSA facilities
  - other federal, State, and local Government facilities
  - facilities located outside the employees' official duty station.

    Note: Resort areas are highly discouraged and will require additional justification (that is, off-season pricing).

2   Planning Policy (Continued)

B   FSA-Sponsored Conferences (Continued)

- FSA meeting sponsor shall address the following evaluation criteria in the conference approval package submitted to the approving official.

    - Does the conference help further the agency's mission or the Department's strategic plan?

    - Could the information be shared through another means such as a teleconference or the Internet?

    - Is the location appropriate and justified? What would a prudent person think about their tax dollars being spent on this conference in this location?

    - Is the number of employees attending justified?

    - Is the meeting location near where most attendees are stationed? If not, the detail cost analysis is to include cost comparisons to location near the majority of attendees. Cost comparisons should include all travel costs and employee payroll for travel time. Agencies are to consider multiple meetings to reduce total cost.

    - If the meeting location is not a USDA or government facility, provide an explanation for not using a government facility.

        Note: FSA is working with OCFO to create a list of available USDA conference/training locations. A notice will be issued as soon as this information is available.

    - Provide a copy of the conference/training/meeting agenda. The agenda does not have to be the final version.

3   Conference Approval Procedures

A   FSA State Events With Total Cost Between $10,000 and $20,000

State Office shall submit a Conference Event Request package with a location cost comparison for at least 2 viable locations using the format in Exhibit 1. State Offices should submit approval request to DAFO at least 30 calendar days before the event.

B   FSA National Office Events With Total Cost Less Than $20,000

Meeting sponsor shall submit a Conference Event Request package with location cost comparison for at least 3 viable locations using the format in Exhibit 1. Meeting sponsor's Deputy Administrator should submit approval requests to FSA Administrator at least 45 calendar days before the event.

3   Conference Approval Procedures (Continued)

C   FSA Events Exceeding $20,000

Meeting sponsors shall submit a Conference Event Request package with a location cost comparison for at least 3 viable locations using the format in Exhibit 1. Meeting sponsors should submit approval request to Under Secretary at least 60 calendar days before the event.

Notes: State Offices shall submit requests through DAFO.

States shall submit a location cost comparison for at least 2 viable locations.

D   FSA Events Exceeding $40,000

Meeting sponsors shall submit a Conference Event Request package with a location cost comparison for at least 3 viable locations using the format in Exhibit 1. Meeting sponsors should submit approval request to CFO at least 60 calendar days before the event.

Note: State Offices shall submit requests through DAFO.

E   FSA Meeting Sponsor Responsibilities

Meeting sponsors shall:

- provide estimated number of conference attendees to meeting planner

- recommend viable conference locations to meeting planner

- evaluate the potential conference site locations

- complete a Conference Event Request package (Exhibit 1) for the conference approving official which includes:

  - Conference or Training Event Request worksheet
  - attendee information
  - justification
  - location cost comparison with pros and cons for each location
  - tentative agenda
  - decision memorandum.

3   Conference Approval Procedures (Continued)

F   FSA Meeting Planner Responsibilities

Meeting planners shall provide:

- conference cost estimates including per diem (lodging and M&IE), airline transportation, mileage, local transportation (shuttle, taxi, etc.), meeting room and audio visual equipment, refreshment costs, speaker fees, business center/copying fees, shipping, etc.

- an explanation of extenuating factors or anomalies in location cost comparison data to meeting sponsors.

4   Annual and Quarterly Conference Reports

A   Annual Conference Plan Reports

Program offices shall:

- complete and submit an Annual Conference Plan Report, formerly referred to as the "Annual Events Calendar" for annual conferences being sponsored by their program for each fiscal year

- use the report format in Exhibit 2 to report conference data

- submit completed reports according to the following table.

Program Area	Submit Report To	Annual Report Due Date
FSA, Administrator Office FSA, DACO FSA, DAM FSA Kansas City	Angela Payton, MSD, by: • mail at STOP 0564 • e-mail to angela.payton@wdc.usda.gov • hand delivery to Room 5728-SB.	August 15
FSA, DAFO FSA, DAFP FSA, DAFLP FSA, State Offices	Mary Tjeerdsma, DAFO, by: • mail at STOP 0542 • e-mail to mary.tjeerdsma@wdc.usda.gov • hand delivery to Room 3721-SB.	August 15

4   Annual and Quarterly Conference Reports (Continued)

B   Quarterly Conference Attendance Reports

FMD shall consolidate FSA's quarterly conference/training data (Exhibit 2) and submit to CFO. All conferences sponsored by USDA or attended by USDA employees will be reported by CFO and will contain the name, location, and date of the conference, the number of USDA employees attending, and costs (including travel expenses) for each conference for which USDA awarded a procurement contract.

Note: Conferences held in USDA facilities are not required to be reported.

Quarterly reports shall be submitted to FMD according to the following table.

Quarter	Period	Report Due to FMD
First	October 1st – December 31st	January 31
Second	January 1st – March 31st	April 30
Third	April 1st – June 30th	July 31
Fourth	July 1st – September 30th	October 31

USDA conference information is published at http://www.catts.ocfo.usda.gov

C   Conference and Training Tracking System (CATTS)

OCFO is developing a workflow-based automated reporting tool to enter and submit conference reporting data. Expect more details and system roll-out in the fourth quarter of FY 2009.

5   Additional Information

A   Contact for Meeting/Event Coordination

Contact the following for assistance with conference planning or approval process.

Agency Area	Meeting Coordination Contact
FSA, Administrator Office FSA, DACO FSA, DAM FSA Kansas City	Angela Payton by any of the following: • e-mail at angela.payton@wdc.usda.gov • telephone at 202-720-0482 • mail at STOP 0564
FSA, DAFO FSA, DAFP FSA, DAFLP FSA, State Offices	Mary Tjeerdsma, DAFO, Program Delivery, Budget, and Resource Staff, by any of the following: • e-mail at mary.tjeerdsma@wdc.usda.gov • telephone at 202-690-2524 • mail at STOP 0542.

5   Additional Information (Continued)

B   Conference Reporting Contact

For questions about conference reporting requirements, contact Linda Smythe, FMD, Debt Management and Travel Policy Office, by either of the following:

- e-mail to linda.smythe@wdc.usda.gov
- telephone at 703-305-1408.

C   Conference Request and Reporting Forms

An electronic copy of Exhibit 1, FSA Conference Event Request package, and Exhibit 2, Conference Report, are available on the DAFO training site at http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov/fsatraining/.

D   Updating 27-AS

27-AS shall be updated after CFO publishes further guidance to USDA's ATR.

Conference or Training Event Request

I. Basic Information

Agency:

Office:

Name of Conference or Training:

Location of Conference or Training (City and State):

Dates of Conference or Training:

Recurring Event:

☐ Yes   If Yes, Frequency:

☐ No

Total Event Cost:

If Total Event Cost is over $100,000, have you obtained clearance from the Office of the Secretary?

☐ Yes (a copy of the approval must be attached)

☐ No

Location Type:

☐ USDA Facility

☐ Government Facility

☐ Conference/Convention Center or University

☐ Hotel

☐ Other   Please Explain:

II. Attendee Information

Total Participants:
Sponsoring/Attending Agency Participants:
Other USDA Participants:
Non-USDA Participants:

Conference or Training Event Request (Continued)

III. Justification

1. Please explain how the conference will help further the agency's mission or the Department's strategic plan.

2. Please explain why the conference or training event is "must-do" considering the limited budgets of the agency.

3. Please explain why the information cannot be effectively shared through another means such as a teleconference, video conference, or the Internet.

4. The number of employees attending is justified.

5. Is the meeting location near where most attendees are stationed? If not, a detailed cost analysis must be performed for at least two alternate locations. The cost analysis must be documented on the Location Cost Comparison chart in section IV below. If more than 3 locations are compared, please either use another Cost Comparison chart or include all the items requested in section IV within the documentation you provide.

Conference or Training Event Request (Continued)

6. If the meeting location is not a USDA or government facility, please provide an explanation over why a government facility is not being used. Please also provide supporting documentation detailing that research was performed to determine the availability and usability of a government facility.

7. The location is appropriate and justified and a prudent person would not think it as a waste of their tax dollars for this conference in this location.

8. Please attach a copy of the conference/training/meeting agenda. The agenda does not have to be a final version.

Conference or Training Event Request (Continued)

IV. Location Cost Comparison

	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3
City & State of Event			
Location of Event			
Lodging			
M&IE			
Airfare			
Mileage			
Miscellaneous Expenses (taxi, shuttle, parking, etc.)			
Total Travel Expense			
Speaker Fees			
Business Center/Printing/Copies/Shipping			
Rental/Facility Charges/AV Equipment			
Refreshment Cost			
Salary Cost*			
Other Costs			
Description of Other Costs			
Total Conference Cost			
Event Total Cost			

* This amount should only include the salary cost of Agency Organizers/Conductors for the time spent organizing or supporting the execution of the event.

For each location listed above, please provide an explanation of the pros and cons of each. If additional documentation is attached for a location rather than an explanation being provided, please note that by writing, "see attached documentation".

Location 1:

Location 2:

Location 3:

Conference or Training Event Request (Continued)

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Credit and Financial Analysis Training (CFAT)
MARCH 23 -27, 2009
(EXAMPLE AGENDA)

The proposed agenda will include the following:

Day 1	March 23 1:00-4:00 PM	Introductions Agenda Chapter 1—Balance Sheets
Day 2	March 24 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM	Chapter 1—Balance Sheets Cont. Chapter 2—Income Statements Chapter 3—Cash flows
Day 3	March 25 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM	Chapter 3—Cash flows Cont. Chapter 4—Financial Analysis
Day 4	March 26 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM	Chapter 5—Fixing Broken Finances and Regaining Financial Strength Video presentations and discussion
Day 5	March 27 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM	Course overview and review Final Examination Final wrap up and discussion

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Conference or Training Event Request (Continued)

V. Decision Memorandum

Included below is a template for creating the decision memorandum for signature by agency heads as well as the Acting Chief Financial Officer. Please copy and paste the template below into a document containing your own agency letterhead and submit the completed memo with your conference/training request. Note that all information included within the brackets must be filled in with the appropriate information.

TO: Jon M. Holladay
                    Acting Chief Financial Officer

FROM: [Agency Head]
                   [Title]

SUBJECT: Approval Request to Conduct a Conference or Training Event in Excess of $40,000

[Agency Name] is proposing to ["host" or "conduct"] [Name of conference/training event] in [City, State] on [Dates of conference/training]. The detailed request with justification, attendee information and estimated costs is attached. Please review and indicate your decision below.

To return the request with a decision or if you have any questions, please contact [agency point of contact, i.e., name, telephone and email address].

Decision (circle one):   **Approved**   **Denied**

Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

Attachment(s)

Conference Report

CONFERENCE/ TRAINING NAME	CATEGORY	A/S	CITY	STATE	START	END	# OF AGENCY PARTICIPANTS	# OF OTHER USDA PARTICIPANTS	# OF NON-USDA PARTICIPANTS	RECUR YES/NO	FREQUENCY

Conference Report (Continued)

SPONSOR	TDY TRAVEL EXPENSES ($)	LOCAL TRAVEL EXPENSES ($)	FEES PAID ($)	SALARY COSTS ($)	SPEAKERS' FEES ($)	PRINTING COSTS ($)	RENTAL/FACILITY COSTS ($)	REFRESHMENT COSTS ($)	OTHER COSTS ($)	COMMENTS	CONTRACTING SPONSORED EVENTS

Conference Report (Continued)

Label the 24 columns as follows:	Enter the following:
1. Conference/Training Name	Provide the exact name of the conference listed in the brochure, flyer, publication, or organization's Web site.
2. Category	Select one of the following: - Training Workforce (Mandatory) - Training Workforce (Mission Critical) - Training Workforce (Discretionary) - Training Partners - Training Participants - Program Execution - Outreach - Communicating Priorities.
3. A/S	Select and provide either "A" for attended conference or "S" for sponsored conference.
4. City	Provide the actual city where the conference was held. Do not list hotel and lodging location.
5. State	Provide the actual state or country where the event was held. Use the standard two-digit postal code or country code. Do not list hotel or lodging location.
6. Start	Provide the beginning date of the conference listed in the brochure, flyer, publication or organization's Web site. Do not list dates of travel. Use the MM/DD/YYYY format.
7. End	Provide the ending date of the event listed in the brochure, flyer, publication, or organization's Web site. Do not list the dates of travel. Use the MM/DD/YYYY format.
8. # of Agency Participants	If attended, provide the total number of agency or program participants who attended the conference. If sponsored, provide total number of agency participants **plus** those employees engaged in the preparation of the conference.
9. # of Other USDA Participants	If attended, enter 0. If sponsored, enter total number of other USDA participants.
10. # of Non-USDA Participants	Attended: enter 0. Sponsored: enter total number of non-USDA participants paid for by the agency. If none, enter 0.
11. Recur Yes/No	Enter 'Yes' if event is held on a periodic basis. Enter 'No' if event is one-time.

Conference Report (Continued)

Label the 24 columns as follows	Enter the following:
12. Frequency	For recurring events only, specify how often the conference occurs using the following codes: QUARTERLY = Q ANNUALLY = A SEMIANNUALLY = H BIANNUALLY = T
13. Sponsor	If attended, list the name in the brochure, flyer, publication, or organization's Web site. If sponsored, list "USDA" and spell out the agency or program name.
14. TDY Travel Expenses ($)	List the travel expenses incurred for each program area to attend or sponsor an event outside the local commuting area. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
15. Local Travel Expenses ($)	List the travel expenses incurred for each program area to attend or sponsor the conference within the local commuting area. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
16. Fees Paid ($)	List the costs paid for each program area to enroll individuals in the conference. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred (**examples**: conference, tuition, or registration).
17. Salary Costs ($)	List the salary costs of employees for each program area engaged in the preparation of the conference. (**EXAMPLE**: Staff salaries.) Do not include salary costs of agency employees attending the conference. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
18. Speakers' Fees ($)	List the costs paid to speakers for services provided at the conference. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
19. Printing Costs ($)	List the costs incurred to print and reproduce materials used at the conference. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
20. Rental/Facility Costs ($)	List the costs incurred to rent the facility used for the conference. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
21. Refreshment Costs ($)	List the costs incurred to provide light refreshments at the conference. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
22. Other Costs ($)	List all additional costs incurred to attend or sponsor the conference. Specify the types of costs in the "Comments" column. Enter $0 if no costs were incurred.
23. Comments	Provide an explanation of "other" costs.
24. Contracting Sponsored Events	Indicate whether a procurement contract was awarded. Attach and send a description of the contracting procedures related to the conference. (***This information is not required for the quarterly conference attendance report.***)