Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on USAID's Conference Policy

An Additional Help for ADS Chapter 580

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Whom do I contact if I have questions about planning a conference, attending an event, or the Agency's conference policy?**

   Each Bureau and Independent Office (B/IO) has a designated Primary Point of Contact (POC) for Conferences. To obtain the name of your POC, please send a request to the Bureau for Management's Conference Management Team at **eConference@usaid.gov**.

2. **Where do I submit a request to attend an external conference or to sponsor an internal conference?**

   B/IOs can make requests to attend an external conference or sponsor an internal conference in the eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS). Events must be approved in accordance with the procedures outlined in ADS 580, Conference Planning and Attendance.

3. **Where can I find the link for eCTAS?**

   You can find a link here or under the "Management Services and Tools" section on the front page of MyUSAID.

4. **Do I need a username and password for eCTAS?**

   You can access eCTAS with your USAID network username and password.

5. **What is the definition of a "conference"?**

   A "conference" is a seminar, meeting, retreat, symposium, workshop, training activity or other such event, regardless of whether travel is involved.

6. **What is the definition of "USAID employee"?**

   For the purposes of the Agency's conference policy, a USAID employee is a Direct-Hire employee, personal services contractor (PSC), including Cooperating Country National (CCN) and Third-Country National (TCN), Foreign Service National (FSN), an individual detailed to USAID from another Federal Government department or Agency, and Participating Service Agreement (PASA).

   The policy indicates the circumstances under which approval for staff under all hiring mechanisms is required (*i.e.*, multilateral conferences which also apply to Institutional Support Contractors).
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7. **Does the conference approval process apply to all training activities?**

No. Certain training events are excluded from the reporting and approval process. A list of exceptions is found in the overview section (580.1) of **ADS 580, Conference Planning and Attendance**.

8. **Who is the approving official for internal and external conferences?**

   The **Administrator** (A/AID) must approve a waiver to fund a single conference with estimated costs in excess of $500,000.

   The **Deputy Administrator** approves expenditures for internal and external conferences with estimated costs greater than $100,000 up to $500,000.

   The **Assistant Administrator for Management (AA/M)** approves expenditures for internal and external conferences with estimated costs of $100,000 or less.

9. **Are there any conferences that can be approved at the B/IO level?**

   The approving official identified in **ADS 580, Conference Planning and Attendance**, must approve all conferences that meet the criteria outlined in the chapter. Each B/IO might have internal requirements for events that do not require approval in the Agency's conference-approval process.

10. **Does the Office of General Counsel (GC) and the Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) need to clear conference memos?**

    GC only clears conference memos when there is a potential ethics issue. B/IOs should consult LPA when an employee is a proposed speaker for an external conference.

MULTILATERAL CONFERENCES

11. **What is the definition of a "multilateral organization"?**

    For the purposes of the Agency's conference policy, a "multilateral organization" is an organization or alliance formed between multiple nations and/or organizations to work on issues that relate to all its members (*e.g*., Gavi – The Vaccine Alliance, Education Cannot Wait, The World Bank).

12. **When is approval from the Assistant to the Administrator for the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (AtA/PPL) required to attend meetings/conferences with multilateral organizations?**

    Approval from the AtA/PPL is required for staff in all hiring categories to attend operational and technical meetings with multilateral organizations when travel is involved, and for all high-level policy conferences/meetings sponsored by multilateral organizations.

13. Does the AtA/PPL have to approve the specific USAID staff proposed to serve on a U.S. Delegation?

Yes. Approval from the AtA/PPL is required for all USAID members of a U.S. Government Delegation.

14. What is the definition of an "official U.S. Government Delegation"?

An "official U.S. Government Delegation" is a group of individuals accredited by the U.S. Department of State to speak, negotiate, and engage in multilateral diplomacy on behalf of the U.S. Government. The Department of State is the only department or agency authorized to accredit delegates.

15. How is the approval handled when staff are attending the same conference from multiple B/IOs?

The B/IO that is responsible for the technical/functional area serves as the coordinator for the event. All Agency participants are included on the Action Memorandum submitted by the responsible B/IO. The Action Memorandum must include the name, office symbol, grade level (if applicable) and role of each person proposed to attend.

16. What information is required for the specific individuals who are proposed for participating in multilateral conferences?

The approval request must include the name, office symbol, grade level (if applicable), and role of each person. Approval from the AtA/PPL is required for any subsequent changes.

17. Do I have to enter a request in the eCTAS even though the AtA/PPL approved my participation in a conference?

B/IOs must enter conferences sponsored by multilateral organizations in the eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS) as an externally sponsored event when five or more employees Agency-wide are in travel status to attend, or direct costs exceed $100,000. B/IOs must enter multilateral conferences co-sponsored by USAID in eCTAS as a USAID-sponsored event when ten or more employees will be in travel status to attend, or direct costs exceed $100,000. See ADS 580.3.3 for additional guidance on USAID-sponsored conferences. B/IOs should not enter all other multilateral conferences in eCTAS, but must provide relevant information in the Action Memorandum.

18. When is accreditation required?

When the rules of procedure for the conference require that delegates be accredited to attend. The United Nations General Assembly is an example. While the rules of procedure that govern a conference might require that participants register, not all participants will necessarily be accredited as delegates.

19. I participate in a multilateral board meeting a few times during the year. Am I required to get the Administrator's approval?

Approval from the AtA/PPL is required. The B/IO must submit an Action Memorandum in accordance with the guidelines provided in **ADS 580.3.2.3**.

20. Is approval required to participate in webinars sponsored by multilateral organizations?

Approval by the AtA/PPL is not required for staff to participate in operational and technical meetings conducted by webinar since no travel is involved, but approval is required for high-level or policy meetings conducted by webinar.

21. Is approval required to attend meetings with multilateral organizations to fulfill my responsibilities as an Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) or Contracting Officer's Representative (COR)?

Site visits performed by AORs, CORs, or Activity Managers to provide oversight of USAID-funded agreements with multilateral partners are exempt from approval.

22. Is approval required to attend a high-level policy conference sponsored by a multilateral organization if no travel is involved, *e.g.,* the Annual Meetings of the World Bank?

Yes. Approval is required for all staff who wish to attend a high-level conference sponsored by a multilateral organization, regardless of location, including ones held via webinar.

23. Are there special requirements for conferences or meetings hosted or sponsored by the WHO?

Yes. On July 6, 2020, the U.S. Government officially informed the Secretary General of the United Nations of our intention to withdraw from the WHO, which will become effective in July 2021. During the year before the withdrawal goes into effect, USAID staff should limit their engagement with the WHO to activities critical to U.S. national and economic security, and to the oversight of existing grants to the organization. AtA/PPL approval is required for staff to participate in any operational, technical, high-level, or policy meetings hosted or sponsored by the WHO, whether in person or conducted via webinar.

24. Is there a template for Action Memoranda to the AtA/PPL?

Yes, see **ADS 580mac, Action Memo Template, Multilateral Conference Attendance**.

USAID-SPONSORED CONFERENCES

25. Do all USAID-sponsored conferences require approval?

No. Approval is required to fund a conference that 10 or more USAID employees in travel status are expected to attend, regardless of cost, or for which the net conference expenses by USAID would exceed $100,000 (excluding salary of employees), regardless of the number of attendees or the travel status of employees. Grant funding is exempt from the approval process, and B/IOs should not include it in determining the dollar threshold. (See **ADS 580sac, Conference Approval Requirements Matrix** and **ADS 580.1** for the full list of exceptions to the approval process.)

26. We plan to convene a three-day conference for Mission Directors conference with approximately 75 USAID staff in travel status. The venue would be the Washington Learning Center, so the only expenses would be travel costs and light refreshments, which would total $120,000. Does this conference fit under the "Mission" exception?

Yes. The exception would apply.

27. What is the process for approval to hold a USAID-funded conference?

The B/IO must enter a request in the eCTAS and upload the required supporting documentation in the system. The POC listed in the system will receive an acknowledgement e-mail when the request is entered and another email to provide the approving official's decision. The Conference Management Team or the Office of the Executive Secretary may request additional information (see ADS **580.3.3 USAID-Sponsored Conferences**).

28. Who is responsible for requesting approval for a conference hosted by a Mission, but funded by a B/IO in Washington, D.C.?

The B/IO that is funding the conference must request approval. For example, the Management Bureau would request approval if it plans to host a conference in Lima.

29. When should I submit a request to sponsor a conference?

The conference coordinator must obtain approval before making commitments or incurring costs. Ideally, the B/IO should submit the approval package sat least 120 days prior to the start date and must request approval at least 30 days prior to the start date.

30. Is approval required if an implementing partner is funding a conference under a grant or cooperative agreement?

No. A conference funded from a grant or a cooperative agreement is exempt from the approval process, unless non-grant expenditures associated with the conference (*e.g.*, travel costs for USAID employees) exceed the threshold criteria.

31. Is approval required for the Mission to hold an all-hands meeting or retreat at the Mission Director's residence? There are no costs associated with the meeting, but employees would receive lunch and light refreshments at an estimated cost of $2,000.

Approval is not required because no employees are in travel status and the cost is less than $100,000.

32. Is approval required to hold routine meetings throughout the year with implementing partners? USAID participation will range between 10-15, and the locations would vary between Washington and the field.

These types of meetings often qualify for the "Mission" exception when the purpose of travel is to attend meetings to discuss USAID's programs and operations, or to perform operational or managerial activities. To qualify under the "Mission" exception, travel and light refreshments must be the only direct costs associated with the event. Approval would be required if 10 or more employees are in travel status and the direct costs include expenses other than travel and light refreshments (*e.g.*, a venue).

33. Several times each year, we send more than 10 employees from our Bureau to meet with implementing partners to review progress on USAID-funded initiatives. In most cases, we rent a venue and provide lunch. Is approval required for this type of meeting?

Approval is required when 10 or more employees in travel status are expected to attend, regardless of cost, unless the event meets one of the exceptions outlined in **ADS 580.1**. In this case, approval would be required, since the Bureau would incur costs for a venue.

34. The policy states that when considering venues, B/IOs must consider a U.S. Government venue. Does this apply to host governments, or is it specific to U.S. Government venues?

The policy is specific to U.S. Government venues be available at no charge, or for a fee. USAID's Washington Training Center or other USAID facilities should be the venue of first choice when feasible.

35. Should I include the salary costs for employees when calculating the direct costs for a USAID-sponsored conference?

B/IOs should not include salary costs in the calculation of the direct costs of a conference. However, they should include them in the Action Memorandum, and in the budget template. The approving official will consider both the direct cost and indirect cost (salary) when making a decision regarding the cost-effectiveness of the conference.

36. Do I need to provide information on the number of USAID-funded institutional contractors proposed to attend a USAID-sponsored conference?

Yes. The B/IO must provide the number of institutional contractors proposed to attend a conference in eCTAS and in the Action Memorandum but should not include travel costs for institutional contractors in the conference budget.

37. How are participants notified that they are approved to attend a USAID-funded conference?

The Conference Coordinator will notify participants when an event is approved.

38. Are participants in USAID-sponsored conferences required to enter a request in eCTAS to attend a USAID-funded conference?

No. Participants do not have to enter a request in eCTAS to attend a USAID-sponsored conference. The Conference Coordinator will inform participants.

39. We have a Participating Agency Program Agreement (PAPA) with another Federal Agency funded with USAID's Program funds. We will fund the conference partially through the PAPA agreement. Does the contribution count toward the $100,000 threshold?

Yes. The policy is applicable to events funded with USAID funds, including those hosted by partners and contributions from Inter-Agency Agreements funded by USAID.

40. Should the conference budget for a USAID-sponsored conference include the full contract cost for a facilitator who is providing services for several events?

No. The budget should only include the cost attributable to the specific event.

41. A list of participants must be provided for a USAID-sponsored conference. What should I do if I need approval to secure the venue before the participant list is finalized?

When approval for a venue is necessary but the full list of participants is not yet known, the sponsoring B/IO may replace the full list with an estimate per B/IO.

42. Are there limitations on the number of employees who can attend a conference from each B/IO or Mission?

B/IOs should consider inviting the minimum number of attendees needed to achieve the goals of the conference.

43. The mission is sponsoring an instructor-led course and does not have a room large enough to accommodate the group. Is approval required to rent a room at a local hotel?

No. Approval is not required. The policy provides an exemption for instructor-led training held at a hotel or other commercial venue when space is not available at a U.S. Government training facility.

44. When USAID provides a sponsorship (*e.g*., \$20,000) for an event hosted by an external party (and we are one of a dozen or so sponsors), does that conference fall into the "USAID sponsored" category?

No. The event would not be USAID-sponsored. In this instance, USAID would have no influence over the planning for the event. The policy regarding external events outlined in **ADS 580, Conference Planning and Attendance**, would apply if USAID employees are attending.

45. Is approval required for USAID to co-host a conference with a multilateral organization? Is this type of event considered a USAID-sponsored conference?

An event co-hosted by USAID and a multilateral organization falls under the policy regarding USAID-sponsored conferences when USAID is responsible for planning and organizing the conference. The approval requirements apply when 10 or more employees will be in travel status or the cost will exceed \$100,000. The Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning, Office of Development Cooperation (PPL/DC) must provide clearance before a B/IO requests approval through eCTAS. While the event might not meet the criteria for approval as a USAID-sponsored conference, PPL/DC must clear the request when the Agency is co-hosting a high-level event with a multilateral organization.

EXytERNAL CONFERENCES

EXTERNAL CONFERENCES

46. I want to attend an externally sponsored conference -- what is the process?

Once you obtain approval from your immediate supervisor, check the eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS) to see if your B/IO has entered the conference. If the event is in the system, then make a request to attend. If the event does not appear in the system, add the event and then make a request to attend. B/IOs must make requests 30 days prior to the start date of the event, or the deadline for the early-registration discounts, if applicable.

The Bureau for Management monitors attendance Agency-wide. If five or more employees make a request, then approval is required. Once approved, employees receive an automatically generated email notification.

47. Do I have to request approval to attend an external conference?

All USAID employees who wish to attend an external conference must enter a request in the **eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS)**.

48. How will I know if I am approved to attend an external conference?

You will receive an email from **econference@usaid.gov** notifying you of the approval.

49. The State Department has requested that 30 of our technical officers attend a meeting in Africa to discuss the annual Country Operational Plans for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Are the travel expenses of employees exempt from the conference approval process under the "Mission" exception?

Yes. The travel expenses are exempt from the approval process.

50. Is approval required to attend an external conference when there is no cost to the Agency.

Approval is not required through the Agency's conference approval process to attend an external conference when there is no cost to the Agency, unless the event is a high-level or policy-related event sponsored by a multilateral organization.

51. Is approval required to attend an external conference when the conference fee is the only cost?

No. Approval is not required to attend an external conference if no travel funded by the Agency is involved.

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