

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

DATE: November 8, 2013
THROUGH: ~~Liz Klein, Associate Deputy Secretary and Rhea Suh, AS-PMB 208-1927~~
FROM: Pam Haze, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Budget, Finance, Performance and Acquisition 208-4775
CC: Laura Davis, Anne Castle
SUBJECT: 2013 American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting Waiver

INTRODUCTION

This memorandum seeks your approval for a waiver to allow Department of the Interior scientists to attend the 2013 American Geophysical Union (AGU) Fall Meeting in San Francisco, California from December 9-13, 2013. Current Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines state that Federal agencies are not to incur expenses from their own funds in excess of \$500,000 for a single conference. However, the Secretary may provide a waiver from this policy if exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of \$500,000 is the most cost-effective option to achieve the program purpose. The circumstances for requesting this waiver are documented below.

BACKGROUND

The Interior conference approval process, which complies with OMB guidance, requires a detailed review by the Deputy Secretary for all conferences that are estimated to cost in excess of \$100,000. The Deputy Secretary has been conducting reviews of conference approval requests since May 2012.

Since the implementation of this policy, the Department has granted two waivers for conference spending in excess of \$500,000. The first waiver was granted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to host the Bureau of Indian Education Summer Institute—a very large training event with costs estimated at \$810,267. The second waiver was granted to USGS for DOI scientists to attend the 2012 Fall Meeting of the AGU (December 3-7, 2012). The estimated cost for this meeting was \$560,262 (*Note: this was an estimate – the actual costs are presented on page 3 of this memorandum*).

The Department's policies and procedures incorporate OMB guidance and are consistent with the President's Executive Order 13589 – Promoting Efficient Spending, and OMB memorandums M-11-35 and M-12-12. Interior's policies provide a framework of internal controls designed to mitigate risks associated with conference planning and spending, and ensure compliance with Federal travel regulations. Our most current policy incorporates new guidance on conference sponsorships, updated conference and sponsorship checklists, and clarified guidance on cost comparisons and adhering to per diem limits.

American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting

The AGU Fall Meeting is an externally hosted conference and is the largest worldwide conference in the geophysical sciences, attracting more than 24,000 Earth and space scientists, educators, students, and other leaders, including government and industry, from around the world. ~~For many years, this meeting has served as a primary venue for USGS scientists to~~ connect with colleagues, broaden their knowledge base, meet with collaborators from distant locations and reduce the need for additional domestic and international travel.

USGS scientists play an important role in the success of the AGU Fall Meeting and USGS stakeholders expect a broad presence and strong participation by the USGS. Over the 46-year history of the AGU, USGS attendees have presented keynote addresses, organized sessions, taught short courses and shared scientific findings at sessions and workshops. USGS scientists also serve as officers in the AGU and other international research organizations that hold science and business meetings in conjunction with the AGU Fall Meeting. Several USGS scientists will be receiving awards and formal recognition for their work at this year's meeting.

For early career scientists, it is important they attend to gain knowledge and experience from more senior scientists both within and outside the USGS. The meeting provides young scientists with exposure and an opportunity to expand their professional networks, discuss their work, consider opportunities for collaboration, find mentors, mentor others, and form professional relationships that promote the future of their research.

The AGU Fall Meeting provides USGS science leadership with the single most cost-effective means of meeting and interacting with the USGS scientists we support and mentor, as well as meeting with students and post-docs seeking career opportunities with the USGS. The AGU Fall Meeting will also be the only opportunity this year for many USGS scientists to share the results of their research with their national and international colleagues. Thus, USGS planned attendance at the 2013 AGU Fall Meeting is slightly higher than 2012 because participation in other conferences was deferred in favor of attending the AGU Fall Meeting as the most comprehensive and significant forum this year.

THE ISSUE

The USGS estimates that costs to attend the AGU Fall Meeting will be \$817,659. This estimated cost exceeds the OMB and Interior guidance limiting an agency from spending more than \$500,000 for a single conference. The importance of USGS attendance at the AGU Fall Meeting to the USGS is well established and is critical to the agency mission. In order for the USGS to maintain its reputation and role as a leader in the Earth science community, to advance bureau science, and to support the development of USGS scientists, attendance at the requested level has been determined to be the most cost-effective means to achieve these important objectives. Approval of a waiver to allow USGS attendance at the AGU Fall Meeting at the requested level would support the bureau mission and help preserve the agency's leadership role in Earth science.

ANALYSIS AND POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

The USGS is proposing to send 538 USGS scientists to attend the AGU Fall Meeting; 174 of the attendees are local. Estimated travel costs are \$813,859 to be funded from appropriated funds and reimbursable funds that USGS receives from other agencies. Sponsorship costs (exhibit booths) are \$3,800. These costs and attendance levels are compared with 2012 AGU Fall Meeting costs in the following table.

Conference Cost Comparison	2012	2013
Number of Attendees	505	538
Total Appropriated \$	\$524,448	\$663,749
Total Reimbursable \$	\$107,102	\$150,110
Sponsorship \$	\$5,450	\$3,800
Total Cost	\$637,000	\$817,659
<i>Average Cost per Person</i>	\$1,261	\$1,517*
<i>* Average per person cost is \$256 higher than 2012.</i>		

In addition to the increase in the proposed number of attendees, several factors have contributed to the per-person and overall conference costs this year. There is a \$20 per person increase for AGU conference registration fees for 2013, and Federal Government per diem lodging costs for San Francisco have increased by \$17 per person per day (accounting for up to \$85 of the \$256 per person increase). Lastly, there has been a significant increase in airfares to San Francisco. However, costs for this year's USGS exhibit and booth have been reduced to \$3,800 (from \$5,450 in 2012).

Over the last 2 years, the USGS has exercised such stringent oversight of conference attendance that for many of our scientists, the AGU Fall Meeting now constitutes the only forum in which they can engage with their peers in the scientific discourse necessary to advance their latest research.

In 2013, overall USGS conference expenses are estimated to be nearly 50 percent less than conference attendance expenses in 2012. This is consistent with the Federal Government's Campaign to Cut Waste, sequestration cuts to non-essential travel and conference attendance, as well as conservative management of bureau conference attendance and expenses. Bureau conference travel costs for FY 2012 and FY 2013 are compared below.

Conference Travel Costs – FY2012-FY2013 Compared				
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	Trips	Cost	Trips	Cost
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Total	4,893	\$6,953,772.70	2,635	\$3,450,140.35

Data represent conference related travel costs from GovTrip database

Under these circumstances, USGS participation in this meeting has been pared back to the minimum level possible, without serious risk both to our reputation as a leader in the earth

science community and to our science itself. At an average cost of \$1,517 per person, attendance at this meeting is the most efficient use of the scientists' time and Federal funding for the value provided to the science from any meeting that USGS scientists attend. ~~Reimbursable funds are provided to USGS scientists by partners and stakeholders who so value our participation that they are willing to bear the costs.~~

The following criteria have been applied to prioritize selection of meeting attendees:

- Officers in the AGU
- Session chairs
- Keynote speakers
- Presenters
- Committee organizers
- Instructors at the conference
- Those having a leadership role in their science area
- Early career scientists

In addition, many senior managers have chosen not to attend the meeting in favor of sending younger scientists who are presenting papers. Some scientists have also asked non-USGS colleagues to present their portion of their science, further reducing USGS attendance and costs.

RECOMMENDATION

USGS participation in the 2013 AGU Fall Meeting at the requested level is vital to ensuring timely delivery of our cutting-edge science and incorporation of the newest advances by other world-class scientists and institutions into bureau research. The bureau has exercised stringent management controls to reduce overall conference attendance and expenses and certifies strict adherence to all Federal Travel Regulations and to all Federal Acquisition Regulations. In addition to the FAR and FTR, the Department's review of the attendance request includes an evaluation of GSA lodging and per diem rates, speakers fees, unusual or questionable costs and conference activities and agenda. Overall, the AGU Fall Meeting provides substantial professional value at an reasonable cost.

We recommend your approval of this waiver.

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SECRETARY'S DECISION

- APPROVE
- DISAPPROVE
- DISCUSS

DATE 11 / 13 / 13



SALLY JEWELL



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, VA 20192

Memorandum

To: Pam Haze, Deputy Assistant Secretary –Budget, Finance, Performance
and Acquisition

Through: Douglas Glenn
Director, Office of Financial Management

cc Anne J. Castle *K. H. Hae*
Assistant Secretary for Water and Science

OCT 16 2013

From: Suzette M. Kimball *Suzette M. Kimball*
Acting Director, U.S. Geological Survey

Subject: Meeting Waiver Request—46th Annual Fall Meeting of the American Geophysical
Union, San Francisco, California, December 9-13, 2013

Introduction

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance on conferences requires a Secretarial waiver on all conferences that are expected to cost in excess of \$500,000. This memorandum requests your approval to request a Secretarial waiver to allow U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) scientists to attend the Fall Meeting of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) – the largest meeting of geoscientists on the planet. This event is the most important meeting of the year for the USGS and has undergone careful review and consideration under the current budget, the Campaign to Cut Waste, and the USGS sequestration operating plan. Attendance helps ensure the quality of the science that informs Department of the Interior (DOI) management and policy decisions.

The DOI conference approval process, which complies with the latest direction from the OMB, requires a line-by-line approval by the Deputy Secretary for all conferences that are estimated to cost in excess of \$100,000. OMB guidance also says that agencies are not to incur expenses from their own funds greater than \$500,000 for a single conference, but that the Secretary may provide a waiver from this policy if exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of \$500,000 is the most cost-effective option to achieve the program purpose. The basis for the waiver is documented below.

Background

This will be the 46th Annual AGU meeting and will include over 24,000 Earth and space scientists, educators, students, and other leaders in the Earth science community including government and industry from around the world. Because of the size of this gathering, it also serves as an important venue for side meetings with distant scientific collaborators, reducing the need for other domestic and international travel. This meeting has become the most cost-effective opportunity for USGS

scientists to maintain their state-of-the-art expertise with insights and understanding of the latest developments and technology in a diverse array of fields. The event provides 5 full days of presentations in dozens of concurrent sessions that run from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. Breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and evenings are filled with panel discussions, town hall meetings, committee meetings, and break-out groups during which the business of science is conducted, taking advantage of the fact that nearly all active geoscientists are present in one place at the same time.

USGS scientists play an important role in the success of this annual meeting; as such, USGS stakeholders expect strong USGS participation. USGS attendees have a long history of presenting keynote talks, organizing sessions, teaching short courses, and sharing scientific findings at sessions and workshops. Several USGS scientists will receive awards and formal recognition of their work. In addition, USGS scientists serve as officers in the AGU and other international research organizations that will hold science and business meetings in conjunction with the AGU meeting.

Senior USGS scientists present keynote addresses and lead sessions. Early career scientists participate for career development and to enhance USGS scientific capacity. For young scientists, it is important they attend to gain knowledge and experience from more senior scientists both within and outside the USGS. The meeting provides young scientists with exposure and an opportunity to expand their professional networks, discuss their work, consider opportunities for collaboration, find mentors, mentor others, and form professional relationships that promote the future of their research.

The AGU annual meeting provides USGS science leadership with the single most cost-effective means of meeting and interacting with the USGS scientists we support and mentor, as well as meeting with students and post-docs seeking career opportunities with the USGS. Travel restrictions implemented in 2013 significantly impacted the ability of USGS scientists and managers to participate and lead technical meetings, workshops, and committee meetings at other forums. The AGU annual meeting will be the only opportunity in 2013 for many USGS scientists to share the results of their research with their national and international colleagues. Thus, the attendance at AGU for 2013 is proposed to increase slightly (plus 33 individuals or 6.5 percent) over 2012 because participation in other conferences was deferred in favor of AGU as the most comprehensive forum.

The Issue

Costs for the meeting are estimated to be \$817,659. This funding would permit 538 USGS scientists to attend the AGU meeting (of these 538 attendees, 174 would be local). These costs and numbers of attendees are compared with the 2012 AGU meeting as follows:

	2012	2013
Number of USGS Attendees	505	538
Total Appropriated	\$524,448	\$663,749
Total Reimbursable	\$107,102	\$150,110
Sponsorship	\$ 5,450	\$ 3,800
Total Costs	\$637,000	\$817,659
Average cost per person	\$ 1,261	\$ 1,517 (\$256.00 difference per person)

Although attendance and costs are up for 2013, the importance of the AGU meeting to the USGS is well established and cannot be overstated—it is critical to our mission. Cuts to AGU attendance in recent years and cuts to spending on other conferences in 2013 have made attendance by our scientists at the AGU meeting this year ever more pressing. The USGS has exercised such stringent oversight of conference attendance that for many of our scientists, the Fall meeting of the AGU now represents the only forum in which they engage with their peers in the scientific discourse necessary to advance their latest research. We are at a point that we can no longer pare back our participation in this meeting without serious risk both to our reputation as a leader in the Earth science community and to our science itself. With an average cost of \$1,517 per person, attendance at this meeting is the most efficient use of the scientist's time and of Federal funding for the value to the science of any meeting that USGS scientists attend. Reimbursable funds are provided to USGS scientists by partners and stakeholders who so value our participation that they are willing to bear the costs.

We developed the following criteria for determining priorities in meeting attendees:

- Officers in the AGU
- Session chairs
- Keynote speakers
- Presenters
- Committee organizers
- Instructors at the conference
- Those having a leadership role in their science area
- Early career scientists

In addition, many senior managers have chosen not to attend the meeting in favor of sending their younger scientists who are presenting papers. Some scientists have also asked non-USGS colleagues to present their portion of their science, thus reducing USGS costs.

Analysis and Position of Interested Parties

Over the past 3 years, the USGS has sustained efforts to exercise stringent management controls to minimize attendance costs at all conferences. Specifically, for AGU, the USGS reduced attendance from 579 in 2010, to 560 in 2011, 505 in 2012, to the current request of 538 in 2013. Increased costs this year can be attributed to an increase in the proposed number of attendees as well as an increase of \$20 per person in the conference registration fee (resulting in an overall increase of \$10,660), and to an increase of \$17 in the Federal Government per diem lodging costs for San Francisco (resulting in an overall increase of \$30,855 for lodging for non-local travelers) and a general increase in airfares. Costs for this year's USGS exhibit and booth have been reduced to \$3,800 (from \$5,450 in 2012).

The USGS has been negotiating with the Executive Director of the AGU to reduce meeting costs to the greatest extent possible for this and future years. The AGU has been accommodating, agreeing to waive the late registration fee and increase the number of virtual meeting sessions for 2013. While not implementable for 2013, additional cost-reduction steps, including remote participation via WebEx and adding more shuttle buses so that attendees can stay at lower cost hotels, are under discussion for the 2014 meeting.

The following are a few of the mission-critical functions that occur at the AGU Fall Meeting:

- Each scientist presenting a paper receives critical feedback from his/her peers prior to publication on methods/interpretation/applications that improve the quality of the science that helps inform DOI management and decisions. This is particularly true of poster papers that encourage one-on-one discussion.
- Each scientist presenting a paper informs the larger community of partners and stakeholders about the latest in DOI results that will be informing decisions, increasing awareness, acceptance, and buy-in. This is particularly true for orally presented papers which are reserved for more mature work.
- Scientists learn of the latest advances in their fields and allied disciplines that impact their own work, increasing the quality and effectiveness of their own research.
- By attending committee and other side meetings that take place during this conference, numerous separate trips to other venues are avoided, saving both money and time for the government, and increasing the efficiency of how our scientists function.
- By attending the AGU meeting, USGS scientists are viewed as active and essential components of the geosciences community. Such recognition is an important part of the promotion process for these scientists and an important part of the recognition of the quality of USGS science.
- Scientists and program managers are able to meet with counterparts to plan initiatives that cross agency and sector (e.g., private foundation-government) boundaries, thus increasing the sources of funding for important work, promoting constructive collaboration, and broadening the scientific input that solves the problems.
- Many staff members attend workshops during AGU to acquire new scientific skills that help them do their jobs better.

Geoscientists consider the scientific process to consist of formulating a project plan, collecting data in the field or lab, analyzing the data, formulating a hypothesis to explain the results, modeling the results, attending the AGU meeting to present the results to peers, writing the paper, and finally publishing the paper. Attending the AGU is as important a step in the scientific process as data collection. It is what geoscientists must do to be sure that their science is high quality, and it is what they have been doing for 50 years.

The science covered in this year's AGU meeting ties directly to all of the USGS mission areas: Climate and Land Use Change (and the newly released President's Climate Action Plan), Core Science Systems, Ecosystems, Energy and Minerals, Environmental Health, Natural Hazards, and Water. AGU focus areas include:

- Biogeochemistry and carbon cycle research
- Biological oceanography
- Earth and planetary surface processes
- Earth and space science informatics
- Geomagnetism and paleomagnetism
- Global environmental change and paleoclimatology
- Hydrology
- Marine geology and geophysics
- Mineral and rock physics
- Natural Hazards
- Seismology and geodesy
- Volcanology, geochemistry and petrology

With the current number of USGS attendees, the cost for this meeting is such that attendance would need to be cut substantially in order to have the costs below the \$500,000 threshold for the meeting to be approved absent a Secretarial waiver. The USGS does have a plan for cutting additional names from the list, but it would affect the dissemination of our scientific information by delaying presentations and collecting peers' feedback and collaboration. Nearly one-third of the scientists attending are from the San Francisco area. Because these and other staff members would need to recoup the mission-critical functions listed above, they would need to travel at times other than the AGU meeting to meet with other agency colleagues and scientists. Thus, the overall travel costs for the bureau would likely be a factor of three or more higher for those individuals who do not attend the AGU. If their science centers or programs are unable to shoulder the burden of a three-time higher travel cost, the science mission will be adversely impacted. Thus, it is not simultaneously possible to minimize overall annual travel costs and avoid the Secretarial waiver.

Recommendation

The USGS recognizes that this request represents a large number of scientists proposed for attendance. As explained above, the AGU Fall Meeting is uniquely essential to this cadre of USGS scientists because of its mission critical subject matter, participation by top-notch scientific colleagues from around the country and the world, and because there is no other venue that provides the same opportunity for scientific learning and advancement in support of the USGS mission. The USGS recognized immediately upon the imposition of Federal travel restrictions that the greatest challenge would be to the AGU meeting. Although concerted attempts have been made over the past several months to decrease the overall costs to less than \$500,000, the USGS does not feel that any additional reductions can be made without adversely impacting the overall quality of its scientific endeavors.

Participation at the level requested is vital to ensuring timely delivery of our cutting-edge science and incorporation of the newest advances by other world-class scientists and institutions into our research. We seek your approval to submit a request to the Secretary of the Interior to waive the \$500,000 limit on conference spending to enable key USGS employees to participate in the 2013 AGU annual meeting.

Please indicate your approval of the USGS Secretarial Waiver Request for attendance at the 46th Annual Fall Meeting of the AGU by signing the approval block on this memorandum and returning it to Melanie Clark, USGS, MS 114 National Center, Reston, Virginia, 20192. For additional information, please contact Anne Dayton, 703-648-4055 or adayton@usgs.gov.

Approve: *Pamela Hale* 10-21-13
Date

Disapprove: _____
Date

cc: AS/WS
Director File – MS 114
Director Chron- MS 114
Melanie Clark – MS 114
AD CLU – MS 409
CLU Chron – MS 409

USGS:CLU:adayton:ad:9/16/13@703-648-4055:DTS#GS13001076

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

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