

## SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE IS CRITICAL TO INNOVATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY

**SPIE, the International Society for Optics and Photonics, supports efforts to encourage federal workers to participate in technical conferences**

Current efforts to restrict federal employee attendance at scientific and trade show events threaten the diffusion of knowledge and erode effective transfer of information and research between the government and the private sector. This collaboration is critical in fostering innovation, creating jobs, and improving national security.

SPIE supports the goals of increased transparency and accountability of government conference travel, without adding to the administrative burden and expense or cutting off the participation of federal scientists and engineers at conferences.

As Representative Rush Holt stated at a Congressional hearing on February 27, 2013: "As we work to ensure oversight on travel expenditures, we also should work to preserve the many benefits of appropriate travel, which can promote collaboration and innovation... As a scientist, I know firsthand how important scientific conferences and meetings are. The informal conversations, as well as the formal presentations and poster sessions that go into a conference among scientists from different institutions, lead to new collaborations that have the promise of new discoveries. These are not fancy junkets."

Technical conferences provide opportunities for federal agencies to advance their research in real and tangible ways:

- Scientific, engineering and technological innovation is increasingly a joint effort between researchers from government, universities, industry, and other institutions. Information exchange through scientific and technical conferences happens three times as fast as through published journals, leading to more rapid innovation.
- It is critically important for federal scientists and engineers to know the top researchers in their fields personally, and to be as current as possible on promising research directions. This is especially true when they are responsible for funding research outside their agencies, or for gathering information on worldwide breakthroughs.
- Many federal program managers use technical conferences as opportunities to engage with a wide collection of researchers for peer review, program reviews and future program planning, and to efficiently examine a large collection of independent research projects. Because the

alternative is multiple visits to individual research laboratories, this approach represents a significant savings of both cost and time.

- Federal researchers and program managers who participate in formal talks, symposia and poster presentations associated with conferences are exposed to thought-provoking questions and comments from fellow researchers, and are engaged in informal conversations that may continue long after the conference or meeting. Such interactions foster productive collaborations and accelerate and improve the work of federal researchers and funders.
- Many science and technology conferences provide undergraduate and graduate students with an opportunity to present their research through poster sessions, allowing federal researchers and program managers an opportunity to recruit prospective employees.

SPIE is concerned that regulations released in a May 2012 OMB memorandum are being applied inconsistently, and often in draconian and inefficient ways, to limit federal participation in scientific and technical conferences. This impedes the dissemination of research that results in useful innovation and will have adverse long-term consequences on our national competitiveness. We are also concerned about efforts to limit federal employee attendance through measures currently pending in Congress.

The science and engineering research community understands that fiscal constraints are currently forcing agencies to administer travel budgets more stringently. We support efforts by Congress and the Administration to ensure the transparency and accountability of federal expenditures, and we encourage you to reach out to stakeholders in the science, engineering and higher education community as you carefully consider oversight policies. Finally, we urge Congress and the Administration to recognize the vital economic significance of meetings to the U.S. economy, the innovation ecosystem, and our competitive position in the world.



*SPIE is the largest international not-for-profit society in optics, photonics and imaging. Together with our 18,000 individual members and 600 corporate members, the Society seeks to build a better world with light through scientific education and innovation. [www.spie.org](http://www.spie.org).*