

November 20, 2012

The Honorable Jeffrey D. Zients
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President of the United States
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Zients:

On behalf of the nation's professional aerospace community, we are writing to seek your consideration regarding recent directives from the Office of Management and Budget that concern federal employee participation in conferences. While the aerospace community recognizes the importance of oversight and control of federal employee travel and meeting expenditures, and of fiscal responsibility and transparency in the use of public funds, we believe that as currently interpreted and implemented, these policies will have the effect of restricting the open exchange of ideas between scientists, engineers, and technologists, thereby adversely impacting the national interest.

We ask that you address this issue to prevent these directives from resulting in an unintended consequence – the suppression of the open exchange of scientific and technical research and industry and government best practices that fuels the advancement of technology that is vital to national security and economic interests, and to improving the human condition. Specifically, we ask that you clarify the Administration's support of these open exchanges of information, and amend guidance to exempt federal employee travel to conferences, seminars, and meetings where attendance promotes the interest of the agency and the professional development and technical competency of government scientists, engineers and other specialized experts (similar to the exemption provided from restrictions on federal employees' participation in widely attended gatherings by 5 CFR Chapter XVI, Subchapter B, Subsection 2635.204(g)(2)). Further, we request that you clarify that the OMB Memorandum M-12-12 definition of meetings does not cover meetings involving Federal Advisory Committees, National Academies meetings, standards-setting bodies, industry-government workshops and conferences, and official international engagements.

Collaboration and idea exchange play a critical role in advancing science, engineering, and technology. Meetings involving the presentation of peer-reviewed papers and other working-level exchanges serve not only the federal workforce but also the broader economic and national security goals of the nation. These events support the investments made in military and civilian technology, federal intellectual property, scientific research endeavors, and engineering development that are crucial for future technological innovations. They also allow provide the knowledge base which federal employees use to make the best possible use of taxpayer dollars. If restrictions on travel to legitimate professional meetings are too onerous, a significant unintended consequence will be the harm done to the progress of science and technology, and to our national interest.

Permitting federal employees to participate in these professional meetings allows them to interact with their colleagues from other agencies, our military's science directorates, universities, and industry to help facilitate technology transfer and intellectual exchanges central to their jobs and the national interest. Taken to the extreme, the proposed new policies will have a chilling effect on scientific discovery and engineering advancement, thereby damaging our nation's unique innovation engine, which is a major contributor to job creation, economic growth, our global competitiveness, and our national security.

Unlike many professions, the nature of work for an acquisition expert, scientist, engineer, and/or technology professional requires a sharing of research findings and collaboration on policy issues with peers and colleagues at conferences and meetings. This peer collaboration process, fundamental to scientific advances and engineering development, is unlikely to be achieved without this interaction. The benefits of collaboration and idea exchange have been extensively recognized in national security, space exploration, climate monitoring, aeronautics development, energy, health sciences, and other fields of endeavor from which the nation has benefited over many years.

In addition, the open exchange of ideas between national policymakers and thought leaders from industry and academia helps to create policies and programs that maximize the impact of investments in research, development, testing, and evaluation, and to ensure that those investments support national goals of economic growth and national security.

Since both the Congress and the Administration have demonstrated high priority emphasis for scientific research and engineering advancement as a critical functions of the federal government, we encourage you to consider not only how policies and procedures can ensure appropriate oversight, but also how to minimize any negative impact on the U.S. scientific and engineering enterprise, meeting your intent without jeopardizing our technological and technical innovation engine and workforce.

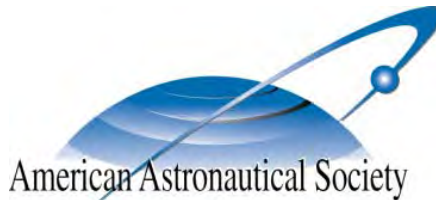
If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Steve Howell at 703.264.7625 or steveh@aiaa.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



The World's Forum for Aerospace Leadership

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American Institute for Aeronautics and Astronautics
Executive Director



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American Astronautical Society
Executive Director



American Geophysical Union

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Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
Congressman John Boehner, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader
Congressman Ralph Hall, Chair, House Committee on Science, Space and Technology
Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space & Technology