

FTC Conference Expenses in FY 2019

In September 2011, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued *Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government* (M-11-35), instructing agencies to review their policies and internal controls for conference-related activities and expenses. In May 2012, OMB issued *Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations* (OMB M-12-12), instructing agencies to initiate senior-level review of all planned conferences and senior-level approval for all future conferences for which net expenses by the agency would exceed \$100,000. This memorandum prohibited expenses in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference without a waiver and required agencies to report publicly on all agency-sponsored conferences with net expenses in excess of \$100,000, and instructed agencies to “ensure that no Federal funds are used for unnecessary or inappropriate purposes and that all conference expenses and activities comply with both Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) and Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requirements on lodging, food and beverages, per diem reimbursement, and contracting of goods and services.”

In November 2016, OMB issued *Amending OMB Memorandum M-12-12, Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations* (OMB M-17-08), requiring agencies to ensure that all conference expenses and activities comply with the FTR and FAR requirements on lodging, food and beverages, per diem reimbursement, contracting of goods and services. M-17-08 also required agencies to ensure that conference attendance and expenses are appropriate to the purpose of the conference and the mission of the agency, and to report on conference expenses on a dedicated place on their official website by January 31st of each year, including a description of all agency-sponsored conferences from the previous fiscal year where the net expenses for the agency associated with the conference were in excess of \$100,000.

Guidance contained in OMB M-12-12 and M-17-08 and the General Services Administration’s FTR Bulletin (FTR § 300-3.1) defines “conference” as “a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or event that involves attendee travel. The term ‘conference’ also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations § 410.404.” In December 2013, GSA issued Bulletin FTR 14-02, *Clarification of Agency Reporting Requirements for Conferences*. FTR 14-02 clarifies “Conference”, as defined by the FTR and for the purpose of reporting requirements. Agencies should reference FTR § 300.3-1 and FTR Chapter 301, Appendix C, "Travel Purpose Identifiers", to determine the travel purpose. If the purpose of travel falls under "Mission" (travel to a particular site in order to perform operational or managerial activities or travel to attend a meeting to discuss general agency operations), agencies are not required to report the travel.

The FTC did not sponsor any conferences in FY 2019 where the net expenses of any one conference exceeded \$100,000. Net conference expenses incurred by the FTC in FY 2019 totaled approximately \$838,000. This figure encompasses approximately 397 conferences.

The FTC hosts, sponsors, and attends conferences both internationally and domestically. The FTC also hosts workshops at its headquarters that bring together stakeholders from industry, academia, public interest groups and the public to discuss new and emerging technologies or markets and how the FTC can best protect both consumers and competition. In FY 2019, FTC employees sponsored, attended, or spoke at conferences in 42 states and the District of Columbia.

The FTC’s consumer protection and competition law enforcement activities necessarily affect the rest of the world, as the United States of America’s commerce is increasingly global in nature. Because American businesses and consumers buy products produced abroad, mergers and business practices that originate overseas often impact American consumers. The FTC hosts, sponsors, and pays for its employees to participate in international conferences that promote sound approaches to common problems by building relationships with sister agencies around the world. These efforts foster consistent outcomes in antitrust investigations, especially regarding international mergers, and take advantage of the tools provided by the [U.S. SAFE WEB Act](#) to strengthen the ability of the FTC to fight cross-border fraud that harms American consumers by sharing information with foreign law enforcement counterparts. In FY 2019, FTC employees sponsored, attended, or spoke at conferences in 38 countries.

Examples of conferences hosted by the FTC or attended by its employees in FY 2019 include:

- International Competition Network (ICN) Annual Conference
- International Consumer Protection & Enforcement Network (ICPEN) Annual Conference
- Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) Conference
- Western Economic Association International (WEAI) Annual Conference
- International Conference on Data Protection & Privacy Commissioners (ICDPPC)
- Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Conference
- USENIX Security Symposium
- Common Ground Conference

Data Source: The FY 2019 travel data set forth above is extracted from FTC’s E2 travel system, consistent with the OMB and FTR definitions of “conference.”