



Why This Matters

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) hosts or sponsors conferences to enhance its mission. These conferences also bring DHS employees and stakeholders together to share information; deliver education or training; and coordinate and collaborate with other Federal and non-Federal stakeholders on common issues or goals. According to DHS, during fiscal year 2012, DHS components hosted or sponsored 35 conferences exceeding \$100,000 at a total cost of \$7.5 million. We conducted this audit to determine whether the DHS conference spending was appropriate, reasonable, and necessary.

DHS Response

The Department concurred with all five of our recommendations. The Department stated that it makes every effort to ensure that controls over conference spending are effective and that conference spending is driven by critical mission requirements. The Department also indicated that it took a proactive approach in addressing the management of conference spending by focusing on improving efficiencies. Some of the efficiencies implemented by the Department include (1) maximizing the use of government office space and facilities for training events and meetings, (2) limiting the number of DHS attendees to a conference, and (3) holding conferences on a biennial rather than annual basis.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

DHS Conference Spending

What We Determined

The amounts spent on conferences by DHS were appropriate, reasonable, and necessary in most instances. Conference packages submitted for approval stated the purpose of the conference and the agenda reflected appropriate content and encompassed full working days for the attendees. However, the Department needs to make further improvements in its guidance related to conference record-keeping and add more specificity in its guidance to ensure conference estimates and reported costs are accurate and adequately documented. DHS has established policies and procedures designed to ensure conference spending is appropriate and in the best interest of the Federal Government and taxpayers. DHS also has policies to ensure it complies with most aspects of the Office of Management and Budget's guidance for conferences. In addition to these efforts, the Department continues to further develop guidance and initiate reviews of component conference spending.

Components did not always accurately estimate or revise conference cost estimates when anticipated costs changed, and did not always accurately report final conference costs. We identified \$329,438 in conference spending for which components did not provide adequate documentation. Additionally, components did not always demonstrate that using external conference planners was cost effective. Consequently, DHS cannot ensure that conference spending is always in the best interest of the Federal Government and taxpayers.

What We Recommend

We recommend that DHS Office of the Chief Financial Officer:

- 1) Require components to document assumptions and methodologies used to develop conference cost estimates and to update cost estimates and resubmit conference approval requests if there is a change in planning assumptions that will affect conference costs.
- 2) Require the Risk Management and Assurance Division to test the accuracy of conference costs reported to the Department in its future Annual Quality Reviews.
- 3) Work with component senior financial officials to define specific record-keeping requirements to ensure accurate and complete reporting of conference costs incurred.
- 4) Require the Risk Management and Assurance division to determine annually whether components maintain adequate conference-related documentation to support all reported costs.
- 5) Strengthen the Financial Management Policy Manual by implementing strict requirements on the use of conference planners.