

National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
Headquarters  
Washington, DC 20546-0001



August 18, 2015

Reply to Attn of:

OCFO/2015-00550f:MDK:ab

The Honorable Brian Schatz  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

The Administrator has asked that I respond to your letter dated July 31, 2015, in which you requested information about NASA's policies for NASA employees, contractors, and grantees for travel to Hawaii and Alaska.

Current NASA travel policies set out requirements for all conferences for NASA civil servants and NASA contractors, to all locations, including Alaska and Hawaii, which are considered domestic travel. The outline below highlights NASA's policy, which has been in effect since March of 2014.

General Travel:

- 1) There are no limitations on civil servant travel as long as the travel is within budget and approved by supervisors. NASA contractor travel is negotiated and set forth as part of the requirements of the contract statement of work.
- 2) If the travel is to a conference, the below implementation guidance also applies.

Conference Attendance:

- 1) The only limitation on conference attendance is the statutory prohibition on the use of appropriated funds to send or otherwise pay for the attendance of more than 50 employees to a foreign conference. (Grants and Cooperative Agreements are exempt from this limitation).
- 2) There are no limitations for domestic conference attendance, however the Agency's conference policy, approval requirements, and tracking are in full effect. (Grants and Cooperative Agreements are exempt).

Conference Attendance & Approval Requirements:

- 1) Any conference costing the Agency \$75K or more must be approved by the Agency Office of Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). In accordance with OMB Memorandum M-12-12, which was incorporated by reference in

Section 739 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015, Pub. L. 113-235, additional Deputy Administrator and Administrator approvals are required for those conference events costing the Agency \$100K or more. These approvals are facilitated by the Agency OCFO. (Grants and Cooperative Agreements are exempt).

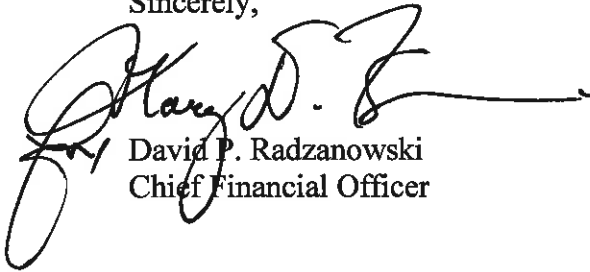
With respect to grants and cooperative agreements, outside of the language in the award, NASA does not direct the travel components of these agreements. The recipient has sole authority to spend the travel dollars as approved in the scope and budget of the award.

Regarding communication of the policy, NASA maintains a MAX.gov website to provide guidance Agency-wide regarding the most current processes relating to conference attendance and approvals. Updates are shared regularly through the website and Agency-wide CFO and program personnel. Every Headquarters office and NASA Center also has a point of contact that serves as a resource to answer any conference-related questions for employees, both civil servant and contractor employees alike.

With respect to recent activity for Hawaii, the NASA Administrator approved the request to spend almost \$1.2 million to send 224 civil servants and contractor employees to the 29th International Astronomical Union held August 3 - 14, 2015, in Honolulu.

We trust this addresses the concerns stated in your letter. Please let us know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David P. Radzanowski", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David P. Radzanowski  
Chief Financial Officer

## United States Senate

July 31, 2015

The Honorable Charles F. Bolden, Jr.  
Administrator  
National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
300 E Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Administrator Bolden:

I am writing to request clarification of the travel policies currently in place for NASA employees, contractors, and grantees for travel to Hawaii and Alaska. This request stems from concerns expressed by scientists in my state about difficulties in getting approval for colleagues to travel to Hawaii for research collaboration purposes.

In a March 2013 memo, NASA enacted new travel policies in response to the directives outlined in the Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-13-05, "Agency Responsibilities for Implementation of Potential Joint Committee Sequestration." In this directive, travel to Hawaii and Alaska were specifically included with foreign destinations as travel "outside of the continental U.S." Such travel required approval at the Officials-in-Charge (OIC) level, a higher level than was required for travel within the continental U.S. Subsequent to the relief from sequestration provided by the budget deal reached in December 2013, NASA's travel policies were revised in March 2014, removing the requirement for OIC approval for travel outside of the continental U.S. and suspending the 50-person limit for attendance at domestic conferences.

While Hawaii and Alaska now appear classified in the same category as other domestic destinations, NASA grantees in Hawaii continue to report being told by NASA officials that research trips to Hawaii by co-investigators and collaborators are not a permissible use of their NASA grant funds. In addition, Hawaii-based scientists report that NASA scientists and engineers cannot obtain approval from their supervisors to travel to Hawaii for collaborative research visits. We have also received reports that in some instances NASA may mistakenly be continuing to apply the higher-level approval requirements and 50-person limit for attendance at foreign conferences to conferences in Hawaii, possibly due to its earlier categorization with foreign destinations in the March 2013 memo.

While I support reasonable safeguards to ensure that taxpayer funds are not used inappropriately, we should also ensure that NASA does not impede legitimate research. In-person interactions between collaborators often prove critical for progress in science and technology research, spurring new ideas and innovations in real time in a way that electronic or voice communication cannot replicate. Therefore restricting research collaboration visits to the non-contiguous states by NASA employees, contractors, or co-investigators based on the mainland puts scientists and research projects based in Hawaii and Alaska at a disadvantage.

I am concerned that although NASA has removed the additional requirements for approval for domestic destinations outside of the continental U.S., the lingering effects of the previous policy which put Hawaii and Alaska in the same category as foreign destinations appear to be causing grant officers and supervisors to discourage or deny requests by employees, contractors, and grantees to travel to Hawaii and Alaska for collaborative visits or conferences.

To clarify the current travel policies for NASA employees, contractors, and grantees, I request written confirmation that NASA now treats travel to Hawaii and Alaska for research collaboration visits and scientific meetings identically to travel to all other domestic destinations. In addition, please describe the steps you have taken within NASA to ensure that supervisors and grant officers are aware of the current policy as it pertains to Hawaii and Alaska specifically.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator