

POSITION STATEMENT

Participation in Professional Conferences by Government Scientists and Engineers

*Adopted by the IEEE-USA
Board of Directors (22 June 2018)*

In recent years, federal budget constraints and concerns about misuse of federal funds by certain agencies for conference-related activities have prompted Congress to legislate, and the executive branch to impose regulations that have seriously limited the ability of government-funded scientists and engineers to participate in scientific or technical conferences and meetings relevant to their professional research and/or agency missions. While some of these restrictions have been relaxed, agency-specific challenges remain with respect to the time required for processing travel requests and with respect to participation restrictions on international meetings.

IEEE-USA strongly supports the active participation of government and Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) scientists and engineers (S&Es) in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) professional meetings and conferences.

It is the position of IEEE-USA that:

- Congress and the executive branch should refrain from adding new restrictions that inhibit participation of government scientists and engineers in STEM professional conferences.
- Congress and the executive branch should endorse the principle that participation in, and sponsorship of, scientific and technical conferences and meetings is essential to the missions of all federal departments and agencies engaged in STEM-related research.
- All federal departments and agencies should adopt streamlined approval processes for scientists and engineers to attend science and technology conferences, with decision-making authority delegated to the lowest practical

level, and with the expectation of a decision within thirty days.

- Special mission-oriented STEM meetings, such as Federal Advisory Committee meetings, National Academies studies, program-review panel meetings, standards-setting meetings, and official international engagements, should be clearly excluded from the definition of conferences in travel-related restrictions.
- Federal agencies should be required to periodically analyze impacts and evaluate risks from limitations on participation in STEM conferences. Identified risks that should be monitored include decline in the quality of scientific research; diminished ability to quickly identify and respond to technology-related threats and opportunities; difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified scientists and engineers; and a receding leadership role within the global S&T community.

IEEE-USA strongly supports and encourages active participation of government and FFRDCs scientists and engineers in STEM professional meetings. Participation allows S&Es to exchange ideas on novel research, remain current in technical disciplines, and form valuable collaborations. Professional conferences tie the U.S. science and engineering community together; promote technical innovation and commercialization; accommodate peer review of research; provide training opportunities; facilitate recruiting; and help educate graduate students. Participation in overseas conferences additionally provides insights into the more than two-thirds of the world's research that is performed outside of the United States.

The IEEE-USA Research & Development Policy Committee developed this statement, and it represents the considered judgment of a group of U.S. IEEE members with expertise in the subject field. IEEE-USA advances the public good and promotes the careers and public policy interests of the more than 180,000 engineering, computing and allied professionals, who are U.S. members of the IEEE. The positions taken by IEEE-USA do not necessarily reflect the views of IEEE, or its other organizational units.