When do I have to Use the ACES VA system to get approval for conferences?

The challenges of getting approval to attend meetings continues. This is a government-wide issue, not just VA. ACES is VA’s system for approving attendance at external meetings not sponsored by the VA. If your researchers want to use VA funds (research, medical, or other) or use FedTraveler to attend an external meeting, they should be sure that this meeting is included on ACES’s list. (I know we had previously advised you to not bother putting small meetings on ACES’s list. However, folks are finding that the travel office will not process their request unless the meeting is in the ACES list.)

The website for ACES is http://vaww.ees.lm.va.gov/Conferences/Guidance/ACES/
1) When you click on “ACES Intake Form”, it opens an email request to list the meeting.
2) Please be sure to include the title of the meeting, the date it takes place, the cost of registering, the registration closure date, and a copy of the brochure or link to the website.
3) If this is a research meeting, please copy your email to VHA10P9ORDOPS@va.gov This lets us know that a research meeting is on the list and that we (ORD) need to be prepared to be a “champion” for the meeting (translation – we have to fill out a lot of forms) if the VA-wide cost is likely to exceed $20,000.
4) If the meeting is small (few attendees), approval can be issued by ACES shortly after the registration period closes. If the VA-side cost is likely to exceed $20,000, approval must come from the UnderSecretary for Health and those are processed once a month.

Note the ACES approval is only required if VA funds (research or medical) are to be used to support the travel. You can travel to a meeting on funds from other sources such as your affiliate, your non-profit, or your own nickel without approval from ACES.

You can travel on official VA time (without VA paying for your travel) if your supervisor approves your trip (your salary while on travel does not count towards the $20,000 VA-wide maximum). However, to travel on VA time, you must use FedTraveler to generate a travel authorization (that is what makes it “travel on VA time”). Book the travel as a “no per diem”, “no mode of travel” trip so that there are no charges except for the FedTraveler processing fee. In the justification box explain clearly that this is a trip at no cost to the VA except for your salary and the FedTraveler fee.

It is also permissible to talk about your VA research while on AA or AL – you just need your supervisor’s approval to do so.

It is possible that some of you may find yourself in a quandary where you do not have ACES approval to attend a meeting, but want to use non-VA funds to support the travel, and want travel on VA time. Your VA travel office may not be willing to process your request without ACES approval. If you run into problems, let us know and we will work with you and your travel office to explain about travel at no cost to VA.

Please note that if the meeting is overseas, the traveler needs to go through the VA passport office and they must receive the request at least 60 days in advance. See the Foreign Travel Wizard at http://vaww.oaa.med.va.gov/ForeignTravel/wizard.aspx

In addition, if an outside entity is paying for the travel, the traveler may need to get approval from OGC to receive the monies as a gift (VA Form 0893) http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0893.pdf