

Testimony of Cynthia Metzler
Chief Administrative Services Officer, U.S. General Services Administration
Before the
Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, U.S. Postal Service and the Census
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

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Good morning Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Lynch, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Cynthia Metzler, and I am the Chief Administrative Services Officer of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). In that capacity, I promote efficiency within the agency and, in part, ensure that our travel and conference policies have strong controls, effective oversight, and focus on reducing costs.

Under new leadership, GSA has refocused on its mission of delivering the best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology service to government and the American people. GSA has instituted a number of reforms internally to meet this goal. To streamline and simplify our services, make GSA more efficient, and provide greater accountability and transparency, GSA is consolidating many of our central services. The Acting Administrator has put in place new leadership in the Public Buildings Service and the Federal Acquisition Service to reinvigorate our business lines and continue our reform efforts. To lead the consolidation of GSA's financial services and to stress the importance of strong oversight of GSA's finances, we have hired a new Chief Financial Officer. Last year, to ensure taxpayer funds were being used wisely, we cut Senior Executive Service bonuses substantially and put in place a targeted hiring freeze across the agency. And by engaging GSA's staff through the "Great Ideas Hunt," we have put in place simple reforms that are anticipated to save taxpayers an estimated \$5.5 million per year.

GSA's travel policies have also been reformed to reflect this mission. GSA has put in place strict internal travel and conference policies to reduce costs, provide strong oversight, and ensure that travel only occurs when necessary. Additionally, as part of our agency's mission to serve our Federal partners and deliver savings, we are providing tools to allow agencies to better manage their travel and conference spending and we are working with OMB on changes to government-wide travel policies to increase efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs, and incorporate industry best practices. These efforts are in line with the Administration's aim to promote cost reduction across a wide range of administrative expenses, particularly travel and conferences.

GSA's Policies –

GSA has instituted rigorous new controls and oversight to ensure that all proposed travel and conference expenses are cost-effective, serve legitimate mission needs, and have appropriate levels of review.

Travel can only be approved when all other alternatives, including video-conferencing, teleconferencing, and webinars have been considered. Additionally, travel must be for work related to GSA's essential mission, such as building inspections or conducting litigation. To ensure all travel requests received appropriate review, GSA has instituted policies that limit the use of blanket authorizations and require that travel is authorized in advance on a trip-by-trip basis. And to make sure that what is often the most costly travel is only done for legitimate purposes, any international travel request must be approved by the Deputy Administrator.

Conferences can no longer be held without submission of a detailed justification, a proposed budget, and review and approval from multiple divisions. At minimum, this means any conference, no matter the proposed cost, is reviewed both by the head of the relevant division and GSA's Chief Administrative Services Officer (CASO). In line with Administration guidance, when the proposed cost of a conference is more than \$100,000, the Deputy Administrator must approve it, and if a conference is more than \$500,000, the Acting Administrator must approve it and document the justification for why it must be held. To ensure that we carefully scrutinize any internal management meetings, the Deputy Administrator must review and approve these regardless of cost. Additionally, even attendance at a conference requires multiple layers of approval, including by our CASO. Employees must justify their potential attendance and outline their expenses.

GSA now requires mandatory annual online training regarding conference attendance for GSA employees through the Conference Attendance Training module. This training highlights the importance of considering cost-effective alternatives like teleconferencing, and ensures every employee understands the difference between appropriate and inappropriate expenses. Employees learn about the Federal Travel Regulations, ensuring better compliance. To date, more than 11,000 GSA employees have completed the training, and we have presented the training to other agencies to either incorporate into their own training courses or to use our web capability for their own agency use.

In line with the Administration's policies, we also have provided greater transparency into our conference expenses. We have posted all approved, agency-sponsored conferences held last year with a cost of over \$100,000 on a publically available website¹ that includes the budget and a justification for why the conference was held. We are contemplating ways to provide additional transparency into our travel and conference expenses.

All told, these changes under our new leadership have dramatically reduced costs, improved oversight, and made certain that travel and conference expenses are fully justified and mission-related. Through the end of Fiscal Year 2012 alone, these policies have helped to save more than \$28 million in travel and transportation costs.

Government-Wide Efforts –

¹ "2012 Annual Conference Report for OMB Memorandum M-12-12." *U.S. General Services Administration*. January 31, 2013. U.S. General Services Administration. February 2013. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/161587>.

This Administration has been clear about the need to cut wasteful spending and increase efficiency. Executive Order 13589, "Promoting Efficient Spending," directed agencies to cut waste in Federal government spending and identify opportunities to promote efficient and effective spending, including a reduction in conference and travel costs. This EO was further translated into guidance with OMB Memorandum M-12-12, "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations," which provided policies and practices to achieve these efficiencies. Among other items, this Memorandum directed agencies to reduce their travel expenses by 30 percent off a Fiscal Year 2010 baseline, require the approval of senior officials for conferences with expenses over \$100,000, prohibit conferences with expenses of more than \$500,000 (unless the agency's head provides a waiver finding that exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference is the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose), and increase transparency on these costs.

The requirements on travel and conferences have already been implemented within GSA, and are outlined in detail above. To further these efforts government-wide, GSA has also looked for ways we can assist agencies by providing tools to help them better manage their travel and conference costs.

To help agencies prioritize use of Federally-owned space, GSA has created an online tool known as "Federal Meeting Facilities,"² which identifies Federal agencies that have conference and meeting space for agencies' use. Conducting business and hosting conferences in space controlled by the Federal government is one way to reduce travel and related costs. The tool allows agencies to search and sort through a variety of different offerings, with contact information for the agency point of contact to work with to secure the space.

Additionally, GSA intends to enhance our e-Gov travel system through the award of ETS2³ to help further consolidate online travel booking services, driving additional cost-savings and efficiencies while delivering improved accountability and reducing waste. ETS2 will be leveraged to standardize conference spend reporting to meet the requirements of OMB to provide greater transparency, as well as internal control enhancements that will allow agencies to track, monitor, and control conference attendee numbers and dollars spent.

GSA is also utilizing data to allow agencies to make better decisions about where to host conferences, when they are determined to be needed. GSA's Conference Planning Tool compares potential destinations by major cost drivers, such as airfare and per diem, enabling agencies to make data-backed decisions on where meetings should be held. GSA is training administrative officers in over 20 Federal agencies on how to identify low cost destinations and venues for conferences and meetings.

² "Federal Meeting Facilities." *U.S. General Services Administration*. February 2013. U.S. General Services Administration. February 2013. <http://fedmeetingspace.cfo.gov>.

³ "Transition Support – ETS2." *U.S. General Services Administration*. November 20, 2012. .S. General Services Administration. February 2013. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104420>.

As part of this effort, GSA is also utilizing its unique leverage, in coordination with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Defense (DOD), to help achieve savings through government-wide travel policies. As a first step, GSA froze the Federal per diem travel reimbursement rates, keeping FY13 reimbursement rates at FY12 levels. This will result in an anticipated \$20 million in avoided costs in FY13, helping to meet the Administration's directives to reduce government-wide travel costs.

Additionally, GSA is proposing to eliminate what is known as the conference lodging allowance. This allows travelers attending a conference to exceed the maximum lodging per diem rate by up to 25 percent when authorized by the hosting agency or by the traveler's agency if a conference is hosted by a private party. We have already taken away this provision at GSA, and are currently following the process to eliminate this provision government-wide.

Finally, GSA is interested in finding ways to further reduce the government's travel costs long-term. Last year, we announced the formation of a Government-Wide Travel Advisory Committee (GTAC). The GTAC's purpose is to review existing travel policies, processes, and procedures to determine ways agencies can achieve their mission-related travel needs at the lowest possible cost. To ensure we get input from all relevant stakeholders, the Committee's members will be chosen from the travel industry, local and state governments, travel and convention bureaus, and representatives from corporations and the Federal Government. The GTAC will provide advice and recommendations for improvements to increase travel efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs, and incorporate industry best practices. To ensure transparency on how these recommendations are formulated, Committee business will be posted publically, in line with the rules for Federal Advisory Committees.

In sum, GSA believes that these government-wide efforts will result in significant savings for government and the American people.

Conclusion –

The Administration is focused on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the government, including reducing travel and conference costs. GSA is committed to helping with those efforts. We have already taken swift action on GSA's internal policies, provided tools to other agencies to help them make better travel and conference spending decisions, and are working with OMB and DOD on broader reforms that would result in even greater savings long-term.

GSA is fully dedicated to its renewed mission of delivering the best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology service to government and the American people. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and I welcome any questions you have.

Cynthia A. Metzler

Chief Administrative Services Officer, U.S. General Services Administration



Cynthia A. Metzler was appointed chief administrative services officer for the U.S. General Services Administration, effective August 22, 2011.

In this role, Metzler will direct and coordinate a variety of internal management and support services within the agency to help GSA better serve its agency customers and the American taxpayer.

Before her appointment at GSA, Metzler ran her own small business advising nonprofit organizations on building strong and effective management teams. Before that, she served as president and chief executive officer for Experience Works, where she led an extensive organizational transformation that used technology and other business processes to improve performance.

In the 1990s, Metzler served in senior executive positions within the Department of Labor's Office of Administration and Management, including acting secretary, acting deputy secretary, and assistant secretary. In these positions, she provided internal and external leadership for the department's programs, budget, operations, and policy. In addition to her government experience at the Department of Labor, Metzler has also served in legal capacities at the Federal Labor Relations Authority, advising the chief counsel on key management issues.

Metzler holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Purdue University in Indiana, a Juris Doctor from Indiana University, and a Master of Science in organizational development from American University in Washington, DC.