SECRETARY OF WAR
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

SEP 15 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOW FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Department of War Personnel Participation in External Engagements

The mission of the Department of War (DoW) is to defend the homeland and win the Nation's wars, achieving peace through strength. We have an obligation to the American public to remain the strongest and most lethal force in the world. We must use deliberate and purposeful external engagements to convey our strength, using facts to maintain trust and transparency with our stakeholders. To ensure these tenets are clearly communicated, I am directing the whole of DoW to fully implement and adhere to an enhanced framework for participating in external engagements.

This approach aims to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of policy communication, broaden audience engagement, uphold professionalism, and ensure proper stewardship of U.S. tax dollars. Details on implementing this enhanced framework are outlined below.

1. **Definitions and Applicability.** For purposes of this guidance memorandum, the following definitions and exemptions apply:

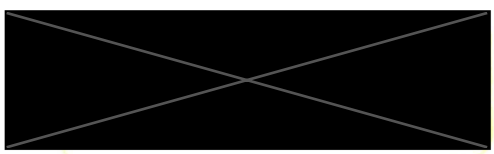
   a. "Participation" is broadly defined as including speaking, presentation, engagement, and mere attendance by DoW personnel in their official capacity.

   b. "External engagements" are broadly defined as including any event hosted by a non-Federal entity (NFE) (see definition for "NFE" in Volume 1 of Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 5410.19).

   c. The following types of events and activities are not subject to the enhanced approval framework outlined in section 3 of this guidance memorandum. However, such participation must still comply with Volumes 1-4 of DoDI 5410.19 and the principles outlined in section 2 of this guidance memorandum.

      - Events where DoW officials are present for the purpose of educating or informing DoW personnel, Veterans and their families, or for the primary purpose of recruiting (see definition for "recruiting" in Volume 1 of DoDI 5410.19).

      - Events in which DoW personnel seek to participate in their personal capacity outside of their standard Department working hours or while in a non-duty status. These include events attended by personnel in their



personal capacity utilizing the "Widely Attended Gathering" gift acceptance exception set forth in 5 C.F.R. § 2635.204(g).

- Broad-based community events that are open to the public where DoW participation is in the form of musical or ceremonial units, aerial demonstrations, equipment displays, and troop formations, including sporting events, air shows, parades, and similar civic events intended to showcase military capabilities and connect Americans to our Service members.

- Engagements, not of national or international media interest, with locally based and focused NFEs that are conducted for the purposes of building relationships with the surrounding community of an installation or command or to inform them of installation or command activities (e.g., local associations of community members or businesses or local government-sponsored or hosted patriotic observances or similar events).

- Media interview requests and community engagements hosted or sponsored by DoW.

- Military-to-military engagements (see definition for "military-to-military engagements" in Volume 1 of DoDI 5410.19) and engagements hosted by foreign governments.

- DoW-hosted or -sponsored engagements with industry to harness and protect the National Security Innovation Base, as well as modernize key capabilities, in accordance with the Deputy Secretary of War Memorandum, "Engaging with Industry," March 2, 2018. This exception does not encompass events hosted by industry trade associations.

- Attendance at events hosted by NFEs in an official capacity for purposes of receiving training related to the attendee's duties or profession, provided the attendee is not a featured speaker or presenter. Attendance in this case must be in accordance with applicable DoW Component and Office of the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness (OUSW(P&R)) policies and guidance.

- Site inspections or other meetings with NFEs necessary for or incident to the solicitation, award, or administration of a contract, agreement, grant, loan, or similar transaction in accordance with applicable DoW policies and the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

- Business meetings with 20 or fewer NFE attendees that are necessary to accomplish the component's core mission where there is no featured speaker, panel, or other presenter(s). This exception for such business meetings does not encompass "roundtable" or similar discussions

conducted for the purpose of exchanging ideas on policies and problem sets.

- Classified events held at the Secret level or above fall outside the scope of PA review and must be assessed by the requesting organization's security manager, absent specific guidance to the contrary.

- DoW legislative activities in accordance with Secretary of War Memorandum, "DoD Congressional Liaison Activities," March 24, 2025.

- Morale, welfare and recreation, and commissary operations and activities conducted under the authority of the OUSW(P&R).

- Engagements with recognized foreign governments or labor unions as required by law, international agreement, or Volume 1231 of DoDI 1400.25, "DoD Civilian Management System: Employment of Foreign Nationals."

2. **Principles of DoW External Engagement.** DoW participation in external engagements should uphold each of the following principles, which supplement DoW outreach policy in Volumes 1-4 of DoDI 5410.19.

   a. **Disclosure.** DoW is committed to ensuring that DoW personnel have access to a wide variety of public fora, and that the public can hear from appropriate DoW officials frequently and in varied formats. Transparency — consistent with the protection of national security — is a core responsibility of the Department, and we take it with the utmost seriousness.

   b. **Broad Audiences.** Both the Department and the American public have an interest in DoW engaging with a broad range of audiences. This is important not only to ensure DoW is able to share information widely, accurately, and as effectively as possible, consistent with the Department's commitment to transparency, but also to ensure that DoW personnel can hear and learn from a wide range of perspectives. This is an important factor today because, in the past, the Department's external engagements have tended to canalize toward certain types of institutions. This risks bias in a way that is unfair to the American public writ large and inhibits the Department's ability to connect with and learn from a broader segment of American society. This guidance does not require engagement solely with institutions that align with the Department's viewpoints. The Department will make a concerted effort to engage with institutions whose representatives possess differing perspectives.

   c. **Accuracy.** It is of the utmost importance for the Department to maintain consistent and aligned public communications that reflect the policy decisions made by the Department's leadership. Both the Department and the American

public, along with Congress and our international counterparts, have a significant interest in ensuring that the interactions of Department officials accurately and effectively convey the Department's policies.

d. **Professionalism.** The Department expects any organization with which DoW personnel engage to exhibit respectful and professional behavior toward the Department, its representatives, and the Administration as a whole. Other institutions need not agree with everything the Department or Administration says or does, but DoW expects them and their representatives to express those disagreements in an informed, fair, honest, and respectful manner. This principle is important to foster a more rigorous, honest, and productive national security discourse. It also serves to avoid suggesting support by the Department or its officials for disrespectful or unprofessional conduct, which is inconsistent with the Department's ethos and its emphasis on the chain of command that is central to how DoW operates. Accordingly, the Department will prioritize engagements with organizations that comport themselves professionally — even if they disagree with the Department's positions.

e. **Cost Efficiency.** The guidance within this memorandum maximizes cost efficiency for DoW participation in external engagements. Where it is not clearly in the public's interest for DoW officials to travel for an external engagement, then the Department will no longer do so. Other steps will also be taken to ensure proper stewardship of U.S. tax dollars to include ensuring appropriate levels of DoW official participation to avoid presentation of redundant or contradictory information by multiple DoW senior leaders.

3. **Implementation.** Effective immediately, the Department is adopting the following framework requirements to implement the guidance in this memorandum. This process will ensure DoW participation in external engagements is aligned with the principles in Section 2 of this memorandum and assist DoW personnel in determining which external events to attend, based on the mission of the Department and best interests of the American public.

This guidance applies to *all* external engagements subject to this enhanced framework, in accordance with Section 1 of this memorandum, including: public or private, in-person or virtual, and unclassified. DoW personnel must seek approval in accordance with the requirements in subsections a and b below, if an event is not clearly excluded from the framework.

All DoW participation in external engagements must comply with Volumes 1-4 of DoDI 5410.19 and other applicable DoW policies and regulations.

a. **Approval.** Requests for approval will be determined as follows:

- **Senior Executive Service (SES) Member/General and Flag Officer (GO/FO) Participation in External Engagement.** The heads of DoW

Components (e.g., Military Departments, Combatant Commands, Joint Staff, Defense Agencies and DoD Field Activities), and Office of the Secretary of War (OSW) Principal Staff Assistants (PSA)), will review and approve requests to participate in external engagements subject to the enhanced framework for any Senior Executive Service (SES) or GO/FO-level requestors in their respective organizations. The heads of DoW Components and the OSW PSAs may delegate in writing such review and approval authority to an individual no lower than the GO/FO or SES level.

  - If, after reviewing the written request submitted in accordance with subsection b below, the DoW Component head or OSW PSA (or designee) determines that the request merits additional review, that official will forward the request to the Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of War for Public Affairs (OATSW(PA)) at osd.pentagon.mbx.engagement-review@mail.mil.

  - Upon receipt of the request, the OATSW(PA), in consultation with the Office of the Under Secretary of War for Policy, will provide final approval or disapproval.

- **GS-15/O-6 and Below Participation in External Engagement.** DoW Component heads and OSW PSAs will ensure their organizations act on requests for approval from DoW personnel at the GS-15/O-6 levels and below, in accordance with the guidance in this memorandum. Authority to approve requests for personnel at the level of GS-15/O-6 and below to participate in external engagements may be delegated in writing to an official no lower than the first GO/FO or SES (or individual appointed to approve on his or her behalf) in the prospective participant's chain of command or supervision. If, after reviewing the written request submitted in accordance with subsection b below, the DoW Component head or OSW PSA (or designee) determines that the request merits additional review, that official will forward the request to OATSW(PA) at osd.pentagon.mbx.engagement-review@mail.mil.

- All decisions on requests to participate in external engagements will be communicated to the requestor in writing by the official who approves or denies the request.

- DoW Component heads and OSW PSAs are expected to provide oversight and accountability within their respective components to help ensure compliance with this memorandum.

- When an external engagement also implicates ethics issues (e.g., an offer of free attendance, free meals, free travel expenses, or any other tangible or intangible item of value), DoW personnel must coordinate with the

appropriate ethics official within their respective component in addition to seeking approval in accordance with this memorandum.

b. Written Request for Approval. DoW personnel interested in participating in an external engagement **must** submit a written request for approval to the appropriate official addressed in subsection 3.a. above. The request must include the following information, as applicable:

- External engagement title, date, and location.
- Host institution and type of institution.[1]
- Type of external engagement[2] and other participants (including organizer, speaker(s), moderator, and attendees, if known).
- Name, rank, and title of proposed DoW participant(s).
- A hyperlink to the event page, if applicable.
- Media: this can include if media will be present, if the event is on- or off-the-record, if the event follows Chatham House rules, and if the event is being recorded.
- Proposed benefits of DoW participation, including responses to the following questions:
    - Principles of Disclosure and Broad Audience: Is the external engagement open to the public?
        - If yes, describe the expected audience, if known, and how the external engagement advances the Department's priorities.
        - Would this external engagement allow DoW personnel to reach new audiences? If so, how?
        - Would this external engagement allow DoW personnel to hear and learn from a broad range of perspectives? If so, how?

[1] Types of institutions can include, but are not limited to, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, research organizations, public policy think tanks, corporate or industry groups, trade associations, private companies, foreign governments, military appreciation groups, entertainment/film, and sporting organizations.

[2] Types of external engagements can include, but are not limited to, conferences, symposia, seminars, roundtables, expos or trade shows, dinners, receptions, lectures, debates, workshops, and working group meetings.

- If no to any of these questions, explain why this external engagement still advances the Department's priorities.

- Principle of Accuracy: Would this external engagement improve the Department's ability to deliver information and positions effectively, accurately, and widely?

  - If so, how? Please be specific about the information that would be conveyed by DoW personnel at this external engagement.

  - If not, why is it still in DoW's interest to participate in this external engagement?

- Principle of Professionalism: Have the host and the host's representatives (as applicable) upheld standards of respectful and professional engagements, including demonstrated adherence to handling disagreements in an informed, fair, honest, and respectful manner? *In accordance with Volumes 1 and 2 of DoDI 5410.19, DoW must not provide support to events or programs where the real or apparent purpose is to stage controversy or confrontation. This provision does not prevent DoW participation when the event is for fair and equitable exchange of diverse opinion.*

  - If not, why is it still in DoW's interest to participate in this external engagement?

- Principle of Cost-Efficiency: How would participation in this external engagement serve to ensure proper stewardship of U.S. tax dollars? Are there any contracts obligated, meaning money that the Department would lose if the event were disapproved or if the Department pulled out of the event?

c. Labor Obligations. Components must satisfy any National Consultation Right notifications and bargaining obligations for labor unions at the appropriate levels of recognition.

