

**National Institute of Standards and Technology
Manufacturing Extension Partnership
Advisory Board
Minutes of the September 16, 2024 Meeting**

Background

The Department of Commerce (DOC) National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Advisory Board (Board) held a meeting open to the public from 10:00 a.m. to 4:53 p.m. on September 16, 2024 at the Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network (MAGNET) in Cleveland, Ohio. The meeting had 48 attendees, including Board members, NIST and NIST MEP staff, participants from MEP Centers, guest speakers and observers. Jennifer Rosa is the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the MEP Advisory Board.

Attendees

Board Members

Donald Bockoven, Vice Chair, MEP Advisory Board and CEO, Fiber Industries LLC
Winston Chang, CTO, Snowflake
Dr. Jermaine Ford, President, Florence-Darlington Technical College
Louis Foreman, CEO, Enventys Partners
Gail Friedberg Rottenstrich, Co-Founder and CEO, Zago Manufacturing Company, Inc.
Bernadine Hawes, Chair, MEP Advisory Board and Senior Advisor, Econsult Solutions, Inc.
Sean Ketter, Vice President, Oshkosh Corporation
Chris Mathews, National Custom Hollow Metal Doors and Frames & Maple Leaf Awning & Canvas
Dr. Annette Parker, President, South Central College
Candice Smith, Director of Enterprise Engineering, The Boeing Company
John T. Smith, CEO, Wood-Mizer Holdings, Inc.
Tyrome Smith, Director of Partnerships, The Common Mission Project
David Vasko, Industry Consultant, NIST

NIST MEP Participants

Mellissa Ayala, Division Chief, Network Agreements Management Division
Scott Dockum, Network Agreements Management Division
Nathan Ginty, Division Chief, National Platforms Division
Aaron Levy, Division Chief, Outreach and External Affairs Division
Jyoti Malhotra, Division Chief, National Programs Division
Heather Mayton, Division Chief, Internal Operations Division and MEP Executive Officer
G. Nagesh Rao, Acting Director
Jennifer Rosa, DFO; Outreach & External Affairs Division
Mark Schmit, Division Chief, Performance Evaluation and Economic Impacts Division
Savann Thorn, National Programs Division
Ben Vickery, National Platforms Division
Marlon Walker, National Programs Division

Guest Speakers

Mojdeh Bahar, Associate Director for Innovation and Industry Services, NIST
Monica Cortez, Director of Business Operations, Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center (TMAC, Texas MEP)
Dr. Ethan Karp, Ohio MEP Sub-Recipient, MAGNET Center Director
Kathie Mahoney, Center Director, MassMEP (MA MEP)
Chris Scafario, Center Director, Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC, PA MEP)
Ranae Stewart, Center Director, Purdue MEP (IN MEP)
Sylvia Wower, Vice President, Consulting and Advanced Technology Research, Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC, PA MEP)

Observers

Mark Bardini, NIST MEP
Monica Claussen, NIST MEP
Nadine DeJesus, NIST MEP
Matt Fieldman, NIST MEP
Timothy Flynn, NIST MEP
Carrie Hines, American Small Manufacturers Coalition (ASMC)
Wiza Lequin, NIST MEP
Chaylee Liberator, MEP at Columbus State
Chris Musumeci, NH MEP
Thomas Nalepa, NIST MEP
Rikki Riegner, PA MEP
Rebecca Singer, Center for Innovative Food Technology (CIFT)
George Singos, Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC, MI MEP)
Jeff Spain, MEP at Columbus State
Mike Vanier, OMEP, (OR MEP)
Ryan Winstead, Battra, LLC

Welcome and Introductions

Speakers

Jennifer Rosa, DFO
Bernadine Hawes, Chair, MEP Advisory Board
G. Nagesh Rao, Acting Director, NIST MEP
Ethan Karp, Ohio MEP Sub-Recipient, MAGNET Center Director
Mojdeh Bahar, Associate Director, Innovation and Industry Services (IIS), NIST

J. Rosa called the meeting to order and briefed the Board on the guidelines for the meeting, as set forth in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). B. Hawes welcomed all in attendance to the meeting, and thanked Ethan Karp for the meeting space and for his work with MAGNET. Board members and staff introduced themselves, and B. Hawes turned the meeting over to N. Rao for his opening remarks. N. Rao thanked the staff and acknowledged Annette Parker, who will retire from South Central College in 2025. N. Rao shared his leadership inspiration from his mentor Peter Cuneo, CEO of Marvel Entertainment,

who was recruited to turnaround the company and lessons Peter learned in the process. Peter's story reminded him of how to lead the MEP program at NIST. He thanked E. Karp and passed the meeting to him. E. Karp welcomed all in attendance and thanked his team for their support. He invited attendees to stay after the meeting for a tour of the MAGNET facility.

Briefing from Associate Director of Innovation and Industry Services

Speakers

Mojdeh Bahar, Associate Director of Innovation and Industry Services, NIST

Update on Staffing and Leadership

- Next MEP Director has been selected, pending Department of Commerce and OPM approval.
- A group of NIST MEP staff including Jyoti Malhotra, Jennifer Rosa, Jose Colucci, Brian Lagas, Doug Deveraux, Michael Taylor, Katie Rapp, Marlon Walker, Adelwiza Lequin, and Carol Shibley have been recognized by NIST with the George A. Uriano Award, acknowledging their establishment of strategic partnerships to drive meaningful impact and achieve transformative outcomes for manufacturers.

Strategic Plan Implementation Working Groups

- Three pillars:
 - Mitigating supply chain vulnerabilities.
 - Narrowing the workforce gap.
 - Adopting and leveraging technology and innovation.

Manufacturing USA

- MEP continues to collaborate with Manufacturing USA institutes, including through memorandums of understanding (MOUs).
 - Clean Energy Smart Manufacturing Innovation Institute (CESMII) MOU to be finalized in October; CESMII has agreed to waive membership fees for all 51 MEP Centers.
 - Cybersecurity Manufacturing Innovation Institute (CyManII) MOU is being finalized; CyManII has promised a discount on membership for MEP Centers.
- MEP is collaborating with NIST Office of Advanced Manufacturing on cybersecurity workforce issues.
- NIST MEP is collaborating to get more Manufacturing x Digital (MxD) sensor boxes to MEP Centers, which will allow more small and medium-sized manufacturers (SMMs) to adopt digital manufacturing.

Noteworthy News Items

- MEP-Assisted Technology and Technical Resource (MATTR) and MATTR+ programs allow MEP to serve as a bridge between small and medium sized manufacturers and NIST laboratories.
 - NIST experts recently assisted a company with traceability for measurements performed using a novel optical instrument.
 - Another MATTR/MATTR+ interaction connected an SMM with a NIST expert to explain aspects of the quantum industry supply chain.
 - MATTR/MATTR+ has also launched a lunch-and-learn webinar series, featuring topics like cybersecurity and operational technology.

- Manufacturing.gov is being revamped through a collaboration between Manufacturing USA and MEP as a one-stop-shop for all things manufacturing. The website is scheduled to relaunch on October 4 to coincide with Manufacturing Day.
- Manufacturing Day is an opportunity for outreach between manufacturers and their communities to spark interest in manufacturing careers and demonstrate the future of the industry. Manufacturing Day occurs on the first Friday in October and this year it will be on October 4. This year's theme is See Yourself in Manufacturing.

MEP Acting Director's Update

Speakers

G. Nagesh Rao, Acting Director, NIST MEP

N. Rao outlined the agenda for the meeting and thanked staff and Board members for their work.

Staffing Update

- 23 hires in the last year, currently a 2% vacancy rate
- Division 480 – Director's Office
 - Wiza Lequin, Acting Chief of Staff
 - Megean Blum, Special Advisor
 - Michelle Townsend, Special Advisor
- Division 483 – National Programs
 - Stella Vewessee, Management and Program Analyst
 - Jessie Zhang
 - Michael Sharp
 - Brian Simmonds
 - Michael Taylor
 - Mary Kombolias
- Division 485 – Outreach and External Affairs
 - Lindsey Kovacs, Communications Specialist
- Division 486 – Internal Operations
 - Christian Reid, Management and Program Analyst
 - Hannah Lee, Program Analyst
- Departures
 - Beverly Bobb, now Chief of Staff at Treasury
 - Monica Claussen, detailing with Treasury

MEP Center Performance Standards Metrics Pause

- Intention is to raise the performance standards to create room for impact.
- Metric update is paused while work continues with partners across the Network to refine the new standards.
- Light interaction reporting began in 2024, and 5,000 light interactions have occurred

Budget

- The FY 2024 appropriation was \$175 million for MEP.
- The FY 2025 appropriation is expected to remain at \$175 million.

MEP National Network (MEPNN) Competitive Awards Program

- Competitive Awards Program (CAP) is in progress and awardees have been selected but pending notification from NIST Grants Management Division. N. Rao will provide a rundown of all awardees during the October Leadership Monthly Call.
- Polaris MEP in Rhode Island, Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, and Kansas MEP are among those launching projects.

Center Visit Plans

- Visiting local MEP Centers is an essential part of supporting the work being done across the country. N. Rao's listening tour has continued since the June meeting, and further visits are being planned.
 - He visited the Massachusetts MEP in June and toured Silverside Detectors.
 - He visited the Maryland MEP in August and saw the Manufacturing Internship Program capstone presentations.

FireWorks Conference 2024

- N. Rao thanked E. Karp for his work hosting the Board meeting and the FireWorks Conference.

Manufacturing Day

- Activities at MEP Centers and clients across the country on October 4 and throughout the month.
- This year's theme, See Yourself in Manufacturing, makes manufacturing more relatable and appealing to young people and underrepresented groups.

Network Agreements Management Division Update

Speakers

Mellissa Ayala, Division Chief, Network Agreements Management Division (NAMD)

NAMD Roles and Responsibilities

- NAMD is responsible for application or competition for, and establishment and oversight of, MEP cooperative agreements. The division works closely with both MEP Centers and internal partners within NIST MEP, NIST, and DOC.

Federal Program Managers (FPMs)

- NAMD formerly had Resource Manager and Federal Program Officer positions, but is transitioning to a unified model where duties will be handled by Federal Program Managers, which will allow a more efficient allocation of resources and enhance relationships with MEP Centers.

FY 2024 Accomplishments

- Published first update to MEP General Terms and Conditions since 2017.
- Provided training to more than 20 new MEP Center Directors and Center Subrecipients.
- Developed and implemented FPM training program including current and new staff.
- Conducted 32 8th year panel reviews.

FY 2025 Goals

- FPM roles go into effect October 1, 2024.
- 11 8th year panel reviews in October and November 2024.
- Florida Award kickoff in January 2025.

- Revised MEP General Terms and Conditions in January 2025.
- New state recompetitions for MEP Centers in July 2025 and January 2026.
- On-demand financial training for MEP Center staff in FY 2025.

Performance Evaluation and Economic Impacts Division Update

Speakers

Mark Schmit, Division Chief, Performance Evaluation and Economic Impacts Division

Division Overview

- The Division's purpose is to measure what matters to MEP Centers and their clients. It currently measures the activities and clients associated with the 51 MEP Centers.
- Clients are concerned about cost reduction strategies, supply chain issues, and employee recruitment and retention.
- NIST MEP currently works with nearly 14,000 clients, but that represents only about 10% of the SMMs in America. M. Schmit urged the Board to look for ways to expand the program's reach to a larger portion of the population, and to increase the rate of growth.

FY 2025 Goals

- Define the metrics that influence Center performance.
- Expand resources for the MEP National Network.
- Expand MEP's research agenda.
- Integrate MEP into broader state-based economic development.
- Blend pillars with base.

National Programs Division Update

Speakers

Jyoti Malhotra, Division Chief, National Programs Division

FY 2024 Accomplishments

- Food Industry Services
 - FDA's Honor Award Program recognized MEP's work developing Standard Reference Materials (SRMs) for the food manufacturing sector.
 - Expanded collaboration opportunities with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Industry 4.0
 - MEP Centers including Rhode Island, Tennessee, Illinois, Texas, and New York have worked closely with Manufacturing USA institutes to develop Industry 4.0 technology services.
 - CESMII Certified Smart Manufacturing Roadmap developed.
- MATTR/MATTR+
 - Handled 11 inquiries this year, on various topics from quantum computing, chemical analysis to metal fabrication.
- Cybersecurity and AI
 - MEP Centers are making good progress in implementing Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC), which is needed for manufacturers in the Department of Defense's supply chain.

- ExporTech Growth
 - Launched ExporTech 2.0.
 - 8 projects with 36 manufacturers.
 - Deepened local and national partnerships.
- Toyota Kata
 - \$1.5 million in new and retained sales.
 - 13 manufacturing jobs created or retained.
- Partnerships
 - MOUs executed with **National Aeronautics and Space Administration** (NASA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Department of Transportation (DOT), MxD, and DoD Office of Small Business Programs.
 - MOUs in progress include Department of Energy (DOE), United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (APTAC), CESMII, CyManII, and FDA-Institute for Food Safety and Health (IFSH).
- Outreach and Engagement Efforts
 - Collaborating with Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges, and the Minority Business Development Agency to supplement their efforts with MEP expertise
- Roundtables
 - Roundtables with the Medical Device Innovation Consortium, Airbus, PepsiCo, and Aspen Institute/Aspen Digital.
- Awards
 - Received the FDA Office of Regulatory Affairs Honor Award.
 - Received the George A. Uriano Award.

FY2025 and Beyond

- Additional CMMC compliance assistance for SMMs.
- Connect the gap between innovation and manufacturing with MATTR/MATTR+.
- Work with CHIPS Program Office on semiconductors.
- Implement OEMs MedAccred effort to enable SMMs.
- Implement MEP recommendations with the National Space Council.
- Expand collaboration with DOE on multiple clean energy initiatives supporting national blueprint for industrial decarbonization.
- Strengthen collaboration with USDA and MEPNN.
- Collaborate with NIST on Emerging Technology Standards Engagement Program, artificial intelligence (AI)-machine learning, additive manufacturing, digital tech, renewable energy, quantum information, etc.
- Interagency agreement with Navy for an Advanced Weapons Elevator System.
- Collaborate with the EXIM Bank Make More in America initiative and International Trade Administration (ITA) for new market entries.
- Focus on cybersecurity, smart manufacturing and AI applications in manufacturing with Industry 4.0.
- Launch Kata in a Box 2.0.

National Platforms Division Update

Speakers

Nathan Ginty, Division Chief, National Platforms Division

FY 2024 Accomplishments

- Supply Chain Optimization and Intelligence Network (SCOIN)
 - Two-year pilot program to mitigate supply chain issues.
 - In-person conference in June.
- Workforce
 - Hosted third annual FireWorks conference (formerly America Works).
 - Competitive Awards Program and NIST Measurement Science and Engineering.
- Network Learning and Knowledge Management
 - Tab Wilkins Emerging Leaders Program (TWELP) 1.15 graduation and TWELP 1.16 launch implemented.
 - TWELP 2.0 program in initial development
 - Initial phase of knowledge management systems roadmapping project completed.

FY2025 Goals

- Supply Chain Optimization and Intelligence Network (SCOIN)/Supplier Scouting
 - Completion of SCOIN projects.
 - SCOIN report looking back at the two-year pilot program.
- Workforce
 - Broaden NIST MEP 2025 Workforce Conference to include other Innovation and Industry Services programs.
 - Workforce Strategic Working Groups and special awards implementation.
- Network Learning and Knowledge Management
 - Enable MEP Advisory Board connections with MEP Center boards, increasing interoperability of the Network.
 - Further development of the knowledge enhancement project, developing prescriptive analytics.

Outreach and External Affairs Division Update

Speakers

Aaron Levy, Division Chief, Outreach and External Affairs Division

Vision

- A. Levy spent his first four months in the office primarily listening, assessing capabilities, and hiring staff. He thanked N. Rao and M. Bahar for their support as he transitioned from FEMA to NIST MEP, and he thanked E. Karp and C. Hines for their work to support MEP Centers.
- The Division needs a unified set of goals to rally around, and presence on a broader set of social media platforms.
- Core outreach works through stories, like the Heroes of Manufacturing video series.
- Plans are developing to unify messaging and present it to a wider audience.

Manufacturing Day

- Occurs on October 4, the theme is See Yourself in Manufacturing, and the hashtag is #SeeYourselfInMFG.
- An opportunity for MEP Centers and manufacturers to engage with the community and create awareness and interest in manufacturing careers.
- Launching new video that will include “person on the street-style” interviews chronicling opportunities in manufacturing.

- J. Rosa has led the Manufacturing Day planning and developed a communication kit for MEPNN.

Manufacturing.gov

- Nicole Ausherman, Senior Communications Specialist, has led the development of the improved manufacturing.gov site.
- Legislation put forward by Senator Peters of Michigan called on the Department of Commerce to revamp the website.
- The new website will launch on Manufacturing Day, October 4.
- Machine learning component scheduled for rollout before the end of 2024 to help field questions on MEP programs.

Communications Objectives

- Four major objectives developed, with the goal of changing MEP from a "best-kept secret" to a known and understood program in the manufacturing sector.
 - Support MEP Centers' communications and outreach efforts.
 - Communicate MEPNN's value and capabilities to key stakeholders.
 - Increase MEPNN brand awareness with SMMs.
 - Educate the public on modern manufacturing careers and the positive impact of SMMs.

Internal Operations Division Update

Speakers

Heather Mayton, Division Chief, Internal Operations Division and MEP Executive Officer

NIST MEP's FY24 Budget

- Available Funding
 - \$175 million appropriation.
 - \$9 million in carryover from FY22.
 - \$5.8 million in prior year recoveries.
 - \$3.6 million in earmarks.
- Planned Expenditures
 - \$138.7 million for Center renewals.
 - \$12.9 million for RCAP/MSE awards.
 - \$9.1 million for contracts.
 - \$11.7 million for NIST MEP salary and benefits.
 - \$17.4 million for MEP and HQ operations.

NIST MEP's FY25 Budget

- Available Funding
 - \$175 million appropriation.
- Planned Expenditures
 - \$136.2 million for Center renewals.
 - \$2 million for disaster awards.
 - Funds set aside in case of unexpected disasters.
 - \$6.5 million for contracts.
 - \$14.8 million for NIST MEP salary and benefits.
 - Up to 23 vacant positions for much of FY24 accounts for the increase between fiscal years.

- \$15.5 million for MEP and HQ operations.

FY24 Accomplishments

- Created training for MEP staff regarding administrative items such as timesheets, travel, and how to use the conference rooms.
- Worked on eliminating single points of failure.
- Created cross-functional collaboration between internal and external divisions across NIST.
- Analyzed and revised key processes and procedures, including telework, onboarding, Alternate work schedules (AWS), and timesheets.
- Developed plans for physical safety and security.
- Served as focal point for all Office of Inspector General (OIG) matters.
- Served on numerous NIST-wide committees.
 - H. Mayton will be Vice Chair of the Operations Advisory Committee in 2025.
- Served as point of contact for administrative, IT, and audit-related issues.

FY25 Goals

- Update MEP policies and procedures.
- Document and review processes.
- Update safety and security plans, including Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
- Document planned actions to address audit and review outcomes and recommendations.
- Document best practices for telework.
- Revamp conference rooms.
- Continue to review processes to eliminate single points of failure.
- Continue to be an asset for MEP staff.

Division Updates Discussion:

- B. Hawes commented that the budget used to be zeroed out every year. She noted that it is important to consider metrics to ensure money is being spent and spent productively. She also noted that the Executive Committee has not met in some time.
- D. Vasko thanked M. Bahar for her work. He expressed excitement about new Manufacturing USA institute collaborations and hope that all 17 institutes will become involved. He appreciated the MATTR/MATTR+ update and expressed a desire for MEP Centers to be more involved in research. He supported the manufacturing.gov website refresh and asked for information on the site to be presented at the meetings of international standards organizations. M. Bahar approved of this idea and noted the importance of highlighting NIST's work in many areas. D. Vasko asked if the Board could take a photo with A. Levy's photo frame for Manufacturing Day, which A. Levy confirmed was the plan. He also asked for an electronic version of the frame.
- G. Friedberg expressed excitement about the manufacturing.gov refresh and asked if input from manufacturers was sought during the development process. M. Bahar described the process of unifying disparate information sources into the one site, and N. Rao described the site as a living digital product, a framework to develop over time. A. Levy commented that, budget allowing, focus group testing with SMMs is planned in 2025 to refine the site. G. Friedberg asked about distribution of the photo frame, and A. Levy thanked J. Rosa for the idea and confirmed that all 51 MEP Centers would receive their own frame for Manufacturing Day photo ops.
- J. Ford thanked N. Rao, M. Bahar, and the team for their presentations.
- T. Smith complimented the "See Yourself in Manufacturing" theme and expressed support for work with HBCUs and MSIs.

- A. Parker expressed support for the manufacturing.gov refresh and asked about outreach to get young people interested in manufacturing careers. A. Levy commented that the initial launch will not have a focus on youth career outreach, but that it is a concern for the future, and that reaching the youth is more likely to happen through popular social media platforms than through LinkedIn. B. Hawes commented that recruitment is essential and should be a focus. A. Parker continued that development of a diverse workforce requires outreach to community and technical colleges, and encouraged collaboration with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education (NSF ATE), and the Department of Labor. J. Malhotra confirmed that National Programs is in collaboration with both NSF ATE and AACC, and that staff has reviewed more than 30 proposals for work with other agencies in the past year.
- J. Smith asked about the connection between SCOIN and possible new tariffs following the upcoming elections, which he emphasized are a significant concern for SMMs. N. Ginty replied that the impact of new tariffs has not been considered, and expressed hope for bipartisan support of domestic manufacturing. N. Rao confirmed that the agency has been engaged with the ITA team.
- S. Ketter thanked the presenters for their direct and polished presentations and asked about target utilization of MEPNN. M. Schmit responded that the goal is for more utilization of the Network and said that more money would allow greater outreach and impact. S. Ketter asked if CMMC is standardized, and J. Malhotra confirmed that it is a standard in the defense industry and may be adopted in other sectors in the future. S. Ketter expressed that capacity is key, but competitiveness is essential, and cost increases will be met with scrutiny. M. Schmit acknowledged that he has seen a similar shift.
- D. Bockoven commented on the high turnover in Center Directors.
- C. Smith commented on integration strategies among the Division Chiefs and asked about the prior year recoveries in the budget presentation. H. Mayton said that recoveries are based on the closing out of the five- and ten-year awards for MEP Centers, which happen on a staggered basis. C. Smith asked about the TWELP program and N. Ginty explained that TWELP and other programs help build capacity in cases of high turnover.
- W. Chang expressed appreciation of the diversity and expertise of the Board. He asked about data sharing and the development of a comprehensive data strategy. J. Malhotra recommended a separate agreement between the agency and agency partners.

Workforce Strategic Working Group Briefing

Speakers

Ben Vickery, National Platforms Division
Ranae Stewart, Center Director, Purdue MEP (IN MEP)

Purpose

- Leverage resources across the MEPNN to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of workforce and organizational development-related activities.
- Create and facilitate opportunities for learning and building Network relationships, including guiding the work of the Workforce Action Team.
- Inform NIST MEP on activities, strategies, and investments needed for expansion of workforce and organizational development practice.

Members

- MEP Center Team

- Steve Black (UT MEP)
- Ranae Stewart (IN MEP)
- Tiffany Stovall (KS MEP)
- NIST MEP Team
 - Megean Blum, MEP Director's Office Special Advisor
 - Nadine DeJesus, Network Agreements Management Division
 - Matt Fieldman, National Platforms Division
 - Jennifer Rosa, Outreach and External Affairs Division
 - Ben Vickery, National Platforms Division

R. Stewart presented on workforce development efforts across the MEPNN from the MEP Center perspective, highlighting four key areas.

Awareness

- Florida MEP has partnered with Girl Scouts to create STEM-focused merit badges.
- Pennsylvania MEP has "What's So Cool in Manufacturing?" videos created by youth in manufacturing facilities.

Pipeline Building

- MAGNET has an apprenticeship program for engaging youth in manufacturing.
- Indiana's MEP works with Purdue University on student capstone projects with SMMs.
- Indiana's Skills for Success program serves to support justice-involved populations and individuals with barriers to employment.

Attraction and Retention

- MEP Centers assist with benefits, onboarding, and job descriptions, and support incumbent workers through quality and leadership development.
- Illinois MEP connects manufacturers with the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program.

Partnerships

- Indiana's MEP works closely with JobCorp and Goodwill Industries, providing them with curriculum for training along with funding mechanisms.

B. Vickery resumed the presentation.

RCAP/CAP awards

- Two newly announced awards have a workforce focus.
 - OK MEP will receive an award to map out workforce recruitment strategies focusing on underserved populations.
 - KS MEP and five other MEP Centers will receive a multi-year award for employee recruitment and retention, including use of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program.
 - MAGNET, Catalyst Connection (PA MEP), and Polaris (RI MEP) are already using the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program.

MEPNN 5-Year Strategic Plan

- Enable SMMs to navigate the current workforce shortage while improving productivity and profitability through:
 - Upskilling.
 - Use of technology and productivity enhancements.

- Partnerships (e.g., connecting educational entities to manufacturing needs and careers).
- Improving work conditions, job quality, career paths, etc.
- Assessing underserved populations and integrating them into the manufacturing industry.
- Making the case for integration of underserved populations with SMMs.
- Build a pipeline of future employees for the manufacturing sector through:
 - Rebranding and marketing the public image of manufacturing.
 - Broadening partnerships and connections with educational and other entities working in this space.

Goals

- Analyze and strengthen workforce-related strategic MEP Center partnerships at all levels.
- Share distinctive practices, identify opportunities for improvement, and collaborate on potential solutions.
- Establish/guide an MEP Workforce Action Team on plan implementation.
- Prioritize competing potential manufacturer workforce core needs with MAB input. (NEW)
- Utilize Working Group and MAB input to determine MEPNN's unique value proposition for workforce. (NEW)
- Help the MEPNN to align workforce offerings with MAB input. (NEW)

Objectives

- Ensure NIST MEP's workforce activities are engaging a large swath of workforce practitioners.
- Consistently publicize and assist MEP Centers in finding workforce funding opportunities.
 - Partnerships with NSF ATE mentioned by J. Malhotra help to bolster this objective.
- Help MEP Centers promote their workforce-related metrics and successes.
- Continuous improvement through training and professional development, with a focus on an annual MEPNN workforce-focused event such as the FireWorks Conference.

Minority-Serving Institutes (MSIs)

- The working group, along with M. Walker and T. Smith, met for a conversation about better partnerships with MSIs. M. Bahar suggested a proof-of-concept approach for further MSI collaboration, focusing in DC/Maryland, SC, NC, Minnesota, and Alabama. T. Smith volunteered to be DC/Maryland point of contact.

MEP Fellows Program

- Two visions are under consideration for a fellows program: one focused on college student internships, and the other on college graduate placements.

Next Steps

- The working group will seek input from the Board and assess interest in participating.
- Formation of the Action Team.
 - Danica Rome, Vice President of Kansas Manufacturing Solutions, is the first member.
- Refine ideas to pursue further.

Discussion

- N. Rao commented on SCOIN and Industry 4.0, noting that CAP proposals will allow interested Centers to develop in these areas.
- D. Bockoven commented that the goal to provide a unique value proposition is essential, and B. Vickery noted that the value proposition is under consideration and clarified that the goals are not listed in priority order.

- J. Ford asked if there are metrics tied to the goals and objectives. B. Vickery replied that metrics are under discussion but not yet established. He noted that the new light interactions may capture additional data for metrics. M. Schmit confirmed that new data is being acquired, and that the core metric for MEP is always focused on the individual company level. J. Ford commented that the MEPNN brand should be widely recognized and not be an industry secret. He emphasized that accomplishing measurable goals improves awareness.
- T. Smith asked about the utilization of partnerships to create a value proposition for clients. B. Vickery replied that learning from regional efforts can help the whole organization. R. Stewart noted that local connections affect possibilities for partnerships and highlighted the unique work the MEP Center in Indiana has done with semiconductors.
- C. Smith encouraged the working group to establish firm success criteria to allow the group to be more proactive.
- G. Friedberg commented on the success of NJ MEP outreach to local high schools in reaching underserved populations. B. Vickery thanked the NJ MEP for their incredible work. N. Ginty noted that MEP is now capturing these events through light interactions reporting.
- M. Bahar described how MEP Centers have become the anchor for hubs in a region and noted that in the initial years of working groups, activity is measurable, and meaningful, long-term outcomes will show up in data in years to come.
- A. Parker commented on grant opportunities and that the MEP Centers' connections can help with connecting entities to employers. She also volunteered to connect the working group with the Community College Presidents Initiative.
- T. Smith noted that former NIST Director and current Morgan State Vice President Willie May was interested in the progress of the working group. B. Vickery noted that the group is pursuing opportunities with Morgan State and other HBCUs.

Leverage Innovation and Technology Strategic Working Group Briefing

Speakers

Scott Dockum, Network Agreements Management Division
 Kathie Mahoney, Center Director, MassMEP (MA MEP)
 Savann Thorn, National Programs Division
 Marlon Walker, National Programs Division

Working Group Members

- Executive Team
 - David Boulay (IL MEP)
 - Kathie Mahoney (MA MEP)
 - Rodney Reddic (TX MEP)
 - Ingrid Tighe (MI MEP)
 - Scott Dockum, NIST MEP
 - Savann Thorn, NIST MEP
 - Marlon Walker, NIST MEP
- Action Team
 - Currently recruiting members

Goals and Milestones

- Completed
 - Launch executive team.
 - Develop charter.

- Pending
 - Establish action team.
 - Conduct current state and need assessment for two focus areas.
 - Develop and implement MEPNN roadmap that aligns strategic plan initiatives.
 - Partner with stakeholders to co-develop tech capabilities and business cases.

Current State Assessment

- The assessment will focus on:
 - Understanding the MEPNN's technology capabilities and services.
 - Understanding how technology services are delivered to SMMs.
 - Identifying gaps in technology services for support.
 - Identifying opportunities to further enable and support MEP Centers.
- Phase I, from September-October 2024, will consist of small group discussions with MEP Center Directors, leveraging existing regional node meetings.
- Phase II, from October-November 2024, will target MEP Center technology practitioners with questionnaires and Technology Communities of Practitioners discussions.

Action Team

- 10-15 people from across NIST MEP and the MEPNN to support roadmap implementation through a collaborative approach to strategic planning and execution.
- Members of the Board are welcome to get involved.

Discussion

- D. Vasko asked whether the team plans to assess the individual capabilities of each Center, or the overall capabilities of the Network. K. Mahoney explained that understanding each Center's capabilities is an important aspect of implementing best practices across the Network. S. Dockum noted that investigating at the level of individual Centers makes common themes clearer.
- D. Bockoven asked about how the working group is tying back to the goals of the strategic plan, and stated he was concerned the working group may not be following the plan. S. Dockum answered that the assessment is essential because knowledge of the Centers is key to being able to implement the plan. M. Bahar stated that technology refers both to the mandate to develop technology in the labs to provide to SMMs and to encourage Centers to adopt technology for better performance. B. Hawes said that understanding the Centers is necessary to implementing the plan. K. Mahoney confirmed that the assessment is the first phase of a process to the strategic plan.
- B. Hawes expressed approval of the makeup of the executive team and encouraged the working group to be involved with the whole Network. S. Thorn noted that feedback from the Centers is needed before larger actions can be taken.
- S. Ketter asked about the expected content of the roadmap. S. Dockum explained that the group won't know until they have the data. N. Rao noted that this working group has the most difficult and nebulous task.
- C. Mathews asked if a tool has been created to assess Centers' capabilities and knowledge. Mr. Thorn said that the group meets with MEP Center Directors monthly to discuss capabilities. K. Mahoney said that development of the assessment is almost completed.
- G. Friedberg noted that adoption of new technology can be a struggle that requires time and dedicated advocates.
- D. Bockoven offered to discuss the history of the strategic plan to avoid repeating the same lengthy conversations every few years. S. Dockum thanked D. Bockoven for the offer. M. Walker said he would welcome that input.
- T. Smith offered to assist the working group. S. Dockum and M. Walker thanked him.

- B. Hawes thanked the volunteers and the working group, and agreed that this pillar of the plan is the most difficult.

Supply Chain Strategic Working Group Briefing

Speakers

Nathan Ginty, Division Chief, National Platforms Division

Chris Scafario, Center Director, Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC, PA MEP)

SCOIN Co-Chairs

- Nathan Ginty, NIST MEP
- Staci Miller (WV MEP)
- Phil Mintz (NC MEP)
- Mike O'Donnell, Center for Industrial Research and Service (IA MEP)

Objective

- To strategically guide SCOIN activities by providing direction and oversight, ensuring that initiatives are effectively aligned with organizational goals and drive meaningful impact across the manufacturing sector.

Activities

- Monthly SCOIN full time employee (FTE) collaboration call.
- Monthly SCOIN focus group FTE call (Squad).
- Monthly report to Network on recent accomplishments/upcoming events.
- MEIS module training.
- Two supply chain in-person meetings.
- Biweekly meetings with Made in America Office at OMB.
- Quarterly meeting with ITA.
- Ongoing external training webinars (27).
- Biweekly supplier scouting report card.

Progress

- 280 different SCOIN projects with 245 unique clients.
- 52 projects surveyed with impacts of:
 - Total sales (new and retained): \$7.1 million.
 - Total jobs (created and retained): 200.
 - Total investment (products and processes, plant and equipment, IT, workforce, other): \$4.39 million.
 - Total cost savings (save and avoid investment): \$900,000.
- Industry/OEM engagement across the areas of:
 - Aerospace Industry Supply.
 - Agribusiness.
 - Automotive Supply Chain.
 - Bio.
 - Clean Energy
 - Offshore wind development.
 - Photo Voltaic (PV) Solar industry.
 - Electric vehicle sector.

- Computer
 - Electronics.
 - Technology.
- Food and Beverage.
- Fruit and Wine Industry.
- Fuel.
- Furniture.
- Infrastructure.
- Life Sciences/Pharmaceutical.
- Metal
 - Manufacturing.
 - Fabrication.
 - Machining.
- Optics.
- Outdoor products.
- Paper.
- Photonics.
- Plastics.
- Semiconductors/CHIPS.
- Textile and Fabrics.
- Wood Industry.

Future

- Resources
 - Supplier Scouting Playbook.
 - How to Engage one-sheeter.
- Future Plans
 - Louisiana/Mississippi presenting assessment tools, September 10.
 - Center AI tools development and awareness.
 - MEP system enhancements.
 - Center mapping presentation, October 7.
 - SCOIN Pilot Program Report.
- Concerns
 - Monetizing and marketing supply chain services.

C. Scafario provided an overview of SCOIN at DVIRC.

- MEPNN excels at finding unlikely, specific resources for clients, and DVIRC has put lots of work into creating webscraping bots and AI to enhance those capabilities.
- Supply chain is one of the key elements of the Center's work, along with technology integration and workforce.
- DVIRC has sought to make Supply Chain 101 training available to all.

Discussion

- T. Smith commented on the Defense Industrial Base and asked how to help MEP Centers and SMMs to find funds. C. Scafario noted that the Center intentionally does not position itself as a grant provider, but highlighted the Center's support of reverse pitch days and other opportunities to connect manufacturers and funding opportunities. N. Ginty commented on cross-government efforts to combine services and information on finance.

- J. Smith thanked the team for their work and asked if the Supply Chain 101 training and the Skills for Success program could be shared with all MEP Centers. C. Scafario replied that the training is open access and would be provided to any interested Centers.
- S. Ketter asked for a breakdown of the SCOIN industry demographics, and asked which supply chain services are provided and might be monetized. N. Ginty answered that the clients are private manufacturers and noted that the most current data contains higher numbers than those reported in the presentation. He noted that supply chain services are Center-specific and should be listed on the website. Services other than supplier scouting and mapping cannot be offered through SCOIN funding. M. Schmit confirmed that no menu of supply chain services is available, but that SCOIN is demonstrating to NIST MEP what the Centers are doing and what is most effective. S. Ketter urged the team not to delay identifying a suite of services, noting that the supply chain landscape changes quickly.
- B. Hawes said that the Board is excited to see the final SCOIN report. She noted that in her time at DVIRC, the Center would insert a staff member into each county's economic development agency.

MEP National Network Brand Refresh

Speakers

Aaron Levy, Division Chief, Outreach and External Affairs Division

Jennifer Rosa, DFO; Outreach and External Affairs Division

Monica Cortez, Director of Business Operations, Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center (TMAC, Texas MEP)

Sylvia Wower, Vice President, Consulting and Advanced Technology Research, Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC, PA MEP)

A. Levy thanked Lindsey Kovacs for her work on the presentations and reminded the Board to participate in “person on the street” interviews after the meeting.

Premise

- The MEPNN logo will not change, but the messaging is being refined.
- MEP Centers were describing the Network in terms inconsistent with the MEPNN official messaging.
- MEPNN branding should be consistent with the five-year strategic plan.
- Both MEPNN and the manufacturing industry have changed since the 2016-2017 branding was created.
- The value of the Network to manufacturers and collaborators has not been clearly defined in messaging.

Process

- Define Desired Outcomes. New messaging should:
 - Increase awareness of the Network.
 - Enhance efficiency and effectiveness.
 - Foster consistency in brand promise and delivery.
- Establish Brand Committee
 - Representatives from all types of MEP Centers and all levels within the MEP Centers.
- Targeted Discovery and Initial Draft
 - Conduct interviews with Brand Committee.
 - Audit and assess MEP Center websites to see local messaging as it stands.

- Consider key audiences
 - SMMS.
 - Federal stakeholders.
 - State and local partners.
- Generate initial draft materials.
- Brand Committee Working Sessions
 - Review and revise draft messaging materials.
- Review by Key Stakeholders
 - Review draft results with MEP Director, Center Leadership Team (CLT), MAB, and other stakeholders.

Value Proposition

- Why should clients care about the Network? What are the MEPNN differentiators?
 - Accountable for results
 - Centers are measured on the impact on clients.
 - Deep connections to the manufacturing ecosystem
 - The largest consulting organization focused on the needs of SMMs.
 - Advance U.S. manufacturing
 - Mission is to address the current and emerging challenges faced by the manufacturing sector.
 - Hands-on approach
 - Consultants have deep industry experience and provide hands-on implementation support.

Product

- Revised MEPNN boilerplate
 - The MEP National Network advances U.S. manufacturing by helping small and medium-sized manufacturers grow, make operational improvements and reduce risk. At MEP Centers in every state and Puerto Rico, over 1,400 manufacturing experts draw on deep industry experience to provide comprehensive, hands-on consulting and training solutions tailored to each manufacturer’s unique challenges.
The MEP National Network has generated over \$150 billion in sales growth for its manufacturing clients since 1988, and generated a 17:1 return on federal investment in 2023.

MEP Center Brand Challenges and Opportunities

M. Cortez presented on her work as TMAC Director of Business Operations.

- TMAC launched a brand awareness campaign highlighting the work of TMAC, NIST MEP, and the MEPNN to Texas state government.
 - As a result, TMAC received state funding for the first time in over 20 years.
- M. Cortez was subsequently asked to join the Brand Committee for the national refresh.
- Messaging is crucial to allow the Network to reach constituents and achieve best results.

S. Wower presented on her work as DVIRC Vice President of Consulting and Advanced Technology Research.

- In 17 years at DVIRC, S. Wower has communicated with 500 manufacturers working on individual rebranding, marketing, market research, and market diversification projects.
- Clients must be bold and understand that the Network will support them.

- MEPNN needs to be strong and unified to support manufacturers in advancing technology, finding new supply chains, pursuing new markets, and reimagining manufacturing for a broader workforce

Next Steps

- Planned rollout in 2025.
- Brand Training
 - Orchestrate training for NIST MEP staff and MEP Centers.
 - Update Brand Handbook.
- Brand Management
 - Encourage consistent use of logo and brand messaging.
 - Manage brand assets.
- Brand Stories
 - Institute processes to identify, collect, and tell powerful Network stories to promote brand adoption.
- Make MEPNN the go-to resource for manufacturing, not a best-kept secret.

Discussion

- D. Bockoven complimented the brand refresh and thanked the team for their work to develop it.
- W. Chang thanked the team for their work on the brand refresh and asked about local networks being a co-brand or a sub-brand to the MEP. J. Rosa answered that the team envisions an alliance brand structure where the MEPNN is a parent or umbrella brand. W. Chang asked if the team received funding for brand awareness marketing, and J. Rosa confirmed that some funding is set aside for that purpose. A. Levy responded that dollars in the Outreach and External Affairs Division budget support this and other projects, but highlighted Congress' distinction between messaging and advertising.
- A. Parker complimented the brand refresh work and asked if the sales growth numbers in the boilerplate would be updated as MEPNN continues to support clients. J. Rosa confirmed that the number is intended to be revised regularly.
- M. Bahar highlighted the difficulty of unifying local, MEP Center and MEPNN brand messaging.
- N. Rao commented that the alliance brand structure allows for equitable benefits across the Network and urged MEP Centers to be in true cooperation across the Network.
- D. Vasko complimented the new messaging and requested that a reference be included for the financial statement in the boilerplate. He asked about unifying the MEP branding across the MEP Centers, and questioned if messaging to large manufacturers is needed, to express how the Network strengthens SMMs and allows them to integrate more successfully into larger manufacturers' supply chains. M. Cortez noted the years MEP Centers have spent building their local brands and said that the established local identity of individual MEP Centers is important to their effectiveness and highlighted the importance of interfacing with international companies bringing manufacturing to the United States. A. Levy expressed hope for a uniform relationship between NIST MEP, the MEPNN and Centers where branding is clear.
- L. Foreman noted that branding is a promise and that MEPNN needs to be mentioned in stories of successful local MEP Centers. B. Hawes agreed that NIST MEP branding needs to be more prominent in the media.
- G. Friedberg asked if the team would consider developing a short, attention-getting motto in addition to the longer boilerplate. A. Levy noted that taglines are a future step of the project. N. Rao described the process of developing a tagline for an SBA program, America's Seed Fund. J. Rosa noted that MEPNN currently has a tagline, "The Go-To Experts for Advancing U.S. Manufacturing."

- B. Hawes expressed concern about MEP Centers being allowed to decide which version of the tagline and boilerplate they use in various communications. J. Rosa explained that the options to be provided will be tailored by length for various platforms, rather than being entirely alternative messaging options.
- C. Mathews expressed approval of the boilerplate, and particularly the opening line.
- M. Cortez proposed "Plant, Nurture, and Grow U.S.-based Manufacturing" as a tagline.
- J. Ford highlighted the importance of brand awareness, brand equity, and market share.
- T. Smith noted the importance of maintaining a clear objective in messaging to create positive outcomes.

Public Comments

Speakers

G. Nagesh Rao, Acting Director

There were no public comments.

Around the Table

Speakers

MEP Advisory Board Members

- L. Foreman thanked the Board for a great meeting and emphasized the importance of taking the opportunity to share stories of MEP Centers enabling American manufacturing success.
- C. Mathews thanked the staff and noted that the organization is just getting started on many new ways to support the mission. He asked for more concrete timetables for implementation from presenters at the next meeting.
- J. Ford said that the Board meeting was time well spent, and noted that the numbers tell, but the story sells. He expressed the importance of scalability and sustainability in all efforts.
- G. Friedberg noted that big changes require big conversations, and thanked the Board, the Chair, and presenters for a great meeting.
- W. Chang highlighted the importance of manufacturing and thanked presenters for their tremendous leadership.
- D. Vasko thanked N. Rao and the presenters for the clear and concise presentations.
- T. Smith thanked the presenters and noted the importance of engagement with the MSI community, the manufacturing.gov relaunch, and messaging around the MEPNN value proposition.
- J. Smith thanked B. Hawes, N. Rao, and the team for the meeting and the presentations.
- C. Smith noted that the MAGNET meeting space motivated and encouraged collaboration. She thanked the presenters, encouraged the working groups to revisit the strategic plan and ensure alignment with it, and asked for more concrete timing and goals in future meetings. She thanked the communications team for being excellent storytellers.
- S. Ketter expressed that the evolution of the MEPNN has been encouraging and noted both the diversity of the Board and the unity of its feedback in certain areas, particularly in its desire for further metrics. He asked that the working groups draw clearer lines between their actions and the

strategic plan in future presentations. He noted that the branding refresh presents an opportunity to engage with a larger pool of potential customers who may not be aware of the Network. He thanked N. Rao, M. Bahar, and the staff for coordinating the meeting.

- A. Parker thanked the program directors and N. Rao for their work and expressed excitement for the announcement of the new MEP Director. She noted that SCION, workforce, partnerships, and the manufacturing.gov website relaunch are particularly exciting.
- M. Bahar thanked the Board and staff for an excellent meeting. She noted approvingly that the Board has become more interactive over the past four years.
- N. Rao thanked M. Bahar and the Board. He said that struggle over the last few years has led to progress as the Network confront the challenges of the 21st century global economy.
- D. Bockoven stated that the fundamental mission and vision of the organization persist even as the strategic plan has developed, and acknowledged the progress made over his years on the Board. He thanked the staff and the MEP Centers and noted the importance of advocacy to make the Network known across the industry.
- B. Hawes said that both the Board and the NIST MEP team have learned from the presentations and highlighted the importance of bolstering the national network. She noted that she turns her phone off after each State of the Union address because of the many messages she has received whenever manufacturing is mentioned on the national stage. She thanked the NIST team for their work and presentations and thanked the MAGNET team for the meeting facility.

Adjournment

With no further business, B. Hawes adjourned the meeting at 4:53 p.m.

Meeting minutes certified by
MEP Board Chair Bernadine Hawes

Bernadine Hawes