

March 9, 2015

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (FFO)
Award Competitions for Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP)
Centers in the States of Alaska, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York,
Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name:** National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), United States Department of Commerce (DoC)
- **Funding Opportunity Title:** Award Competitions for Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Centers in the States of Alaska, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin
- **Announcement Type:** Initial
- **Funding Opportunity Number:** 2015-NIST-MEP-01
- **Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:** 11.611, Manufacturing Extension Partnership
- **Dates:** Electronic applications must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, June 1, 2015. Paper applications will not be accepted. Applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed or considered. The approximate start date for awards under this FFO is expected to be January 1, 2016.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind that (1) a free annual registration process in the electronic System for Award Management (SAM) (see Section IV.3) may take between three and five business days or as long as more than two weeks, and (2) applicants using Grants.gov will receive a series of receipts over a period of up to two business days before learning via a validation or rejection whether a Federal agency's electronic system has received its application. **Please note that a federal assistance award cannot be issued if the designated recipient's registration in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov) is not current at the time of the award.**

- **Application Submission:** Applications must be submitted electronically through www.Grants.gov. NIST will not accept applications submitted by mail, facsimile, or by e-mail. See Sections IV.b.(1)., IV.b.(2)., and IV.b.(7). in the Full Announcement Text of this FFO.

- **Funding Opportunity Description:** NIST invites applications from eligible organizations in connection with NIST's funding up to twelve (12) separate MEP cooperative agreements for the operation of an MEP Center in the designated States' service areas and in the funding amounts identified in Section II.2. of this FFO. NIST anticipates awarding one (1) cooperative agreement for each of the identified States. The objective of the MEP Center Program is to provide manufacturing extension services to primarily small and medium-sized manufacturers within the whole State designated in the applications. The selected organization will become part of the MEP national system of extension service providers, currently comprised of more than 400 Centers and field offices located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.
- **Anticipated Funding Amounts:** NIST anticipates funding up to twelve (12) MEP Center awards with a five-year period of performance and in annual federal funding amounts identified in Section II.2. of this FFO. As discussed in the multi-year funding policy described in Section II.3. of this FFO, obligated funding amounts may be adjusted higher or lower from year-to-year of the award. In addition, as set forth in Section II.4. of this FFO, awards issued pursuant to this FFO may be renewed by NIST on a non-competitive basis for a subsequent period of up to five (5) years, based upon the recipient's satisfactory performance, continued relevance of the project to the mission and priorities of the MEP program, and the availability of appropriated funds.
- **Funding Instrument:** Cooperative Agreement. See Section II.1. of this FFO for additional information concerning the funding instrument for this award.
- **Who Is Eligible:** The eligibility requirements given in this section of the FFO will be used in lieu of those given in the MEP regulations found at 15 CFR part 290, specifically 15 CFR § 290.5(a)(1). Each applicant for and recipient of an MEP award must be a U.S.-based nonprofit institution or organization. For the purpose of this FFO, nonprofit institutions include public and private nonprofit organizations, nonprofit or State colleges and universities, public or nonprofit community and technical colleges, and State, local or Tribal governments. Existing MEP awardees and new applicants that meet the eligibility criteria set forth in Section III.1. of this FFO may apply. An eligible organization may work individually or may include proposed subawards to eligible organizations or proposed contracts with any other organization as part of the applicant's proposal, effectively forming a team. However, as discussed in Section III.3.a. of this FFO, NIST generally will not fund applications that propose an organizational or operational structure that, in whole or in part, delegates or transfers to another person, institution, or organization the applicant's responsibility for core MEP Center management and oversight functions.
- **Cost Sharing Requirements:** This Program requires non-Federal cost share of at least 50 percent of the total project cost for the first through the third years of operation, with increasing minimum non-Federal cost share requirements beginning

in year four (4) of the award. See Section III.2. of this FFO for more information on the non-federal cost sharing requirements under MEP awards.

- **Webinar Information Session:** NIST/MEP will hold one or more webinar information sessions for organizations that are considering applying for this funding opportunity. These webinars will provide general information regarding MEP and offer general guidance on preparing proposals. NIST/MEP staff will be available at the webinars to answer general questions. During the webinars, proprietary technical discussions about specific project ideas will not be permitted. Also, NIST/MEP staff will not critique or provide feedback on any project ideas during the webinars or at any time before submission of a proposal to MEP. However, NIST/MEP staff will provide information about the MEP eligibility and cost-sharing requirements, evaluation criteria and selection factors, selection process, and the general characteristics of a competitive MEP proposal during this webinar. The webinars will be held approximately fifteen (15) to thirty (30) business days after posting of this FFO and publication of an abbreviated solicitation in the *Federal Register*. The exact dates and times of the webinars will be posted on the MEP website at <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>. The webinars will be recorded, and a link to the recordings will be posted on the MEP website. In addition, the webinar presentations will be available after the webinars on the MEP website. Organizations wishing to participate in one or more of the webinars must register in advance by contacting MEP by email at mepffo@nist.gov. Participation in the webinars is not required in order for an organization to submit an application pursuant to this FFO.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).** Questions from applicants pertaining to MEP eligibility, cost-sharing requirements, evaluation criteria and selection factors, selection process, and the general characteristics of a competitive MEP proposal will not be considered on an informal basis. Applicants must submit all such questions in writing to mepffo@nist.gov. Questions submitted to NIST/MEP may be made available to the public as part of an FAQ document, which will be periodically updated on the MEP website at <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>.

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FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Program Description

As required by the MEP regulations, 15 CFR Part 290, specifically 15 CFR § 290.7, this funding opportunity is also announced in the *Federal Register*. In the event of any inconsistency between this FFO and the notice published in the *Federal Register*, the notice published in the *Federal Register* controls.

About the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership

The National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) works with small and medium-sized U.S. manufacturers to help them create and retain jobs, increase profits, and save time and money. The nationwide network provides a variety of services, from innovation strategies to process improvements to sustainable manufacturing, supply chain and technology acceleration services. MEP centers also work with partners at the State and Federal levels on programs that put manufacturers in position to develop new customers, expand into new markets and create new products.

As a program of the U.S. Department of Commerce, MEP offers a range of effective resources to help manufacturers identify opportunities that will accelerate and strengthen their growth and competitiveness in the global marketplace.

The National Network

MEP is a nationwide network of more than 1,200 technical experts - located in every State - serving as trusted business advisors focused on transforming U.S. manufacturers to compete globally, supporting supply chain integration, and providing access to technology for improved productivity. MEP is built around manufacturing extension centers locally positioned throughout the 50 States and Puerto Rico. MEP Centers are a diverse network of State, non-profit university-based, and other non-profit organizations, offering products and services that address the critical needs of their local manufacturers.

Each MEP Center works directly with area manufacturers to provide expertise and services tailored to their most critical needs, ranging from process improvement and workforce development to business practices and technology transfer. Additionally, MEP Centers connect manufacturers with government and trade associations, universities and research laboratories, and a host of other public and private resources to help them realize individual business goals.

Through local and national resources, MEP Centers have helped thousands of manufacturers reinvent themselves, increase profits, create jobs and establish a foundation for long-term business growth and productivity.

The following resources are currently available on the MEP website at:
<http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>:

- System Strategic Plan;
- Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership Operating Plan Guidelines;
- Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership General Terms and Conditions (see also Section VI.2.e. of this FFO); and
- 2014 Annual Report.

The MEP Program is not a Federal research and development program. It is not the intent of this program that awardees will perform systematic research.

To learn more about the MEP Program, please go to <http://www.nist.gov/mep/>

The statutory authority for the MEP Program is 15 U.S.C. § 278k, as implemented in 15 C.F.R. part 290.

II. Federal Award Information

- 1. Funding Instrument.** The funding instrument that will be used for the awards issued pursuant to this FFO is a cooperative agreement. The nature of NIST's "substantial involvement" will generally be collaboration between NIST/MEP and the recipient organizations. This includes NIST/MEP collaboration with a recipient on its progress and approving changes in the statement of work. Additional forms of substantial involvement that may arise are described in Final Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Guidance Implementing the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act, 43 Fed. Reg. 36860-65 (Aug. 18, 1978) and in Chapter 5.C. of the Department of Commerce (DoC) Grants and Cooperative Agreements Manual, which is available at:
[http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants_management/policy/documents/FINAL%20Master%20DOC%20Grants%20Manual%202013%20\(03.01.13\)_b.pdf](http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants_management/policy/documents/FINAL%20Master%20DOC%20Grants%20Manual%202013%20(03.01.13)_b.pdf).

Please note the DoC Grants and Cooperative Agreements Manual is expected to be updated after publication of this funding announcement and before October 1, 2015. Refer to Section VII. of this FFO, Federal Awarding Agency Contacts, Grant Rules and Regulations, if you seek the information at this link and it is no longer working or you need more information.

Examples of NIST involvement in cooperative agreements awarded pursuant to this FFO may include activities such as, but not limited to:

- Guidelines and assistance in developing required plans;
- Guidance for evaluation of performance and collection of data and information from the Recipient organization;
- Approval of key personnel;
- Assistance, where possible, in accessing solutions to technical and managerial problems; and
- Assistance to the Recipient organization to define, understand, and resolve issues pertaining to the successful implementation of the MEP project.

For further information related to NIST’s substantial involvement in this award, please refer to the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership General Terms and Conditions to which a link is located in Section VI.2.e. of this FFO.

2. Funding Availability. NIST anticipates funding twelve (12) MEP Center awards with an initial five-year period of performance in accordance with the multi-year funding policy described in Section II.3. of this FFO. Initial funding for the projects listed in this FFO is contingent upon the availability of appropriated funds.

The table below lists the twelve (12) States identified for funding as part of this FFO and the estimated amount of funding available for each:

MEP Center Location and Assigned Geographical Service Area (by State)	Anticipated Annual Federal Funding for Each Year of the Award	Total Federal Funding for 5 Year Award Period
Alaska	\$500,000	\$2,500,000
Idaho	\$640,236	\$3,201,180
Illinois	\$5,029,910	\$25,149,550
Minnesota	\$2,653,649	\$13,268,245
New Jersey	\$2,814,432	\$14,072,160
New York	\$5,985,194	\$29,925,970
Ohio	\$5,246,822	\$26,234,110
Oklahoma	\$1,309,080	\$6,545,400
Utah	\$1,147,573	\$5,737,865
Washington	\$2,534,872	\$12,674,360
West Virginia	\$500,000	\$2,500,000
Wisconsin	\$3,250,792	\$16,253,960

Applicants may propose annual Federal funding amounts that are different from the anticipated annual Federal funding amounts set forth in the above table; provided, that the total amount of Federal funding being requested by an Applicant does not exceed the total amount of federal funding for the five-year award period as set forth in the above table. For example, if the anticipated annual Federal funding amount for an MEP Center is \$500,000 and the total Federal funding amount for the five-

year award period is \$2,500,000, an Applicant may propose Federal funding amounts greater, less than, or equal to \$500,000 for any year or years of the award, so long as the total amount of Federal funding being requested by the Applicant for the entire five-year award period does not exceed \$2,500,000.

- 3. Multi-Year Funding Policy.** When an application for a multi-year award is approved, funding will usually be provided for only the first year of the project. Recipients will be required to submit detailed budgets and budget narratives prior to the award of any continued funding. Continued funding for the remaining years of the project will be awarded by NIST on a non-competitive basis, and may be adjusted higher or lower from year-to-year of the award, contingent upon satisfactory performance, continued relevance to the mission and priorities of the program, and the availability of funds. Continuation of an award to extend the period of performance and/or to increase or decrease funding is at the sole discretion of NIST.
- 4. Potential for Additional 5 Years.** Initial awards issued pursuant to this FFO are expected to be for up to five (5) years with the possibility for NIST to renew the award, on a non-competitive basis, for an additional 5 years at the end of the initial award period. The review processes in 15 C.F.R. § 290.8 will be used as part of the overall assessment of the recipient, consistent with the potential long-term nature and purpose of the program. In considering renewal for a second five-year, multi-year award term, NIST will evaluate the results of the annual reviews and the results of the 3rd Year peer-based Panel Review findings and recommendations as set forth in 15 C.F.R. § 290.8, as well as the Center's progress in addressing findings and recommendations made during the various reviews. The full process is expected to include programmatic, policy, financial, administrative, and responsibility assessments, and the availability of funds, consistent with Department of Commerce and NIST policies and procedures in effect at that time.

5. Kick-Off Conference

Each recipient will be required to attend a kick-off conference, which will be held at the beginning of the project period, to help ensure that the MEP Center operator has a clear understanding of the program and its components. The kick-off conference will take place at NIST/MEP headquarters in Gaithersburg, MD, during which time NIST will: (1) orient MEP Center key personnel to the MEP program; (2) explain program and financial reporting requirements and procedures; (3) identify available resources that can enhance the capabilities of the MEP Center; and (4) negotiate and develop a detailed three-year operating plan with the recipient. NIST/MEP anticipates an additional set of site visits at the MEP Center and/or telephonic meetings with the recipient to finalize the three-year operating plan.

The kick-off conference will take up to approximately 5 days and must be attended by the MEP Center Director, along with up to two additional MEP Center employees. Applicants must include travel and related costs for the kick-off conference as part of the budget for year one (1), and these costs should be reflected in the SF-424A

covering the first four (4) years of the project. (See Section IV.2.a.(2). of this FFO.) These costs must also be reflected in the budget table and budget narrative for year 1, which is submitted as part of the budget tables and budget narratives section of the Technical Proposal. (See Section IV.2.a.(6).(e). of this FFO.) Representatives from key subrecipients and other key strategic partners may attend the kick-off conference with the prior written approval of the Grants Officer. Applicants proposing to have key subrecipients and/or other key strategic partners attend the kick-off conference should clearly indicate so as part of the budget narrative for year one of the project.

6. MEP System-Wide Meetings

NIST/MEP typically organizes system-wide meetings approximately four times a year in an effort to share best practices, new and emerging trends, and additional topics of interest. These meetings are rotated throughout the United States and typically involve 3-4 days of resource time and associated travel costs for each meeting. The MEP Center Director must attend these meetings, along with up to two additional MEP Center employees.

Applicants must include travel and related costs for four quarterly MEP system-wide meetings in each of the five (5) project years (4 meetings per year; 20 total meetings over five-year award period). These costs must be reflected in the SF-424A covering the first four (4) years of the project (see Section IV.2.a.(2). of this FFO) and in the SF-424A covering year five (5) of the project (see Section IV.2.a.(10). of this FFO). These costs must also be reflected in the budget tables and budget narratives for each of the project's five (5) years, which are submitted in the budget tables and budget narratives section of the Technical Proposal. (See Section IV.2.a.(6).(e). of this FFO).

- 7. Indirect (F&A) Costs.** NIST will reimburse applicants for proposed indirect (F&A) costs in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.414. Applicants proposing indirect (F&A) costs must follow the application requirements set forth in Section IV.2.a.(8). of this FFO.

III. Eligibility Information

- 1. Eligible Applicants.** The eligibility requirements given in this section of the FFO will be used in lieu of those given in the MEP regulations found at 15 CFR part 290, specifically 15 CFR § 290.5(a)(1). Each applicant for and recipient of an MEP award must be a U.S.-based nonprofit institution or organization. For the purpose of this FFO, nonprofit institutions include public or private nonprofit organizations, nonprofit or State colleges and universities, public or nonprofit community and technical colleges, and State, local or Tribal governments. Existing MEP awardees and new applicants who meet the eligibility criteria set forth in this section may apply. An eligible organization may work individually or may include proposed subawards to

eligible organizations or proposed contracts with any other organization as part of the applicant's proposal, effectively forming a team. However, as discussed in Section III.3.a. of this FFO, NIST generally will not fund applications that propose an organizational or operational structure that, in whole or in part, delegates or transfers to another person, institution, or organization the applicant's responsibility for core MEP Center management and oversight functions. See *also* Section IV.6. of this FFO for funding restrictions under the MEP Program.

2. **Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement.** Non-Federal cost sharing of at least 50 percent of the total project costs is required for each of the first through the third year of the award, with an increasing minimum non-federal cost share contribution beginning in year 4 of the award as follows:

Award Year	Maximum NIST Share	Minimum Non-Federal Share
1-3	1/2	1/2
4	2/5	3/5
5 and beyond	1/3	2/3

Non-Federal cost sharing is that portion of the project costs not borne by the Federal Government. The applicant's share of the MEP Center expenses may include cash, services, and third party in-kind contributions, as described at 2 C.F.R. § 200.306, as applicable, and in the MEP program regulations at 15 CFR § 290.4(c). No more than 50% of the applicant's total non-Federal cost share for any year of the award may be from third party in-kind contributions of part-time personnel, equipment, software, rental value of centrally located space, and related contributions, per 15 CFR § 290.4(c)(5). The source and detailed rationale of the cost share, including cash, full- and part-time personnel, and in-kind donations, must be documented in the budget tables and budget narratives submitted with the application and will be considered as part of the review under the evaluation criterion found in Section V.1.c.ii. of this FFO.

Recipients must meet the minimum non-federal cost share requirements for each year of the award as identified in the chart above. For purposes of the MEP Program, "program income" (as defined in 2 C.F.R. § 200.80, as applicable) generated by an MEP Center may be used by a recipient towards the required non-federal cost share under an MEP award.

As with the Federal share, any proposed costs included as non-Federal cost sharing must be an allowable/eligible cost under this program and under the Federal cost principles set forth in 2 C.F.R. part 200, Subpart E. Non-Federal cost sharing incorporated into the budget of an approved MEP cooperative agreement is subject to audit in the same general manner as Federal award funds. See 2 C.F.R. part 200, Subpart F.

As set forth in Section IV.2.a.(7) of this FFO, a letter of commitment is required from an authorized representative of the applicant, stating the total amount of cost share to be contributed by the applicant towards the proposed MEP Center. Letters of commitment for all other third-party sources of non-Federal cost sharing identified in a proposal are not required, but are strongly encouraged.

3. Other

a. **MEP Core Management and Oversight Functions.** An MEP Center, as a direct recipient of Federal financial assistance funds under an MEP cooperative agreement, must possess and maintain, at all times during an MEP award period, accountability to directly manage and execute all functions material and inherent to the successful operation of a Center, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. **Budget execution**, including the responsibility for determining and executing budget policy, guidance and strategy, and the determination of program priorities and associated budget or funding requests;
2. **Policy implementation**, including the responsibility for determining the content and implementation of financial and program policies and procedures impacting the recipient's MEP project;
3. **Human resources management**, including the responsibility for selecting individuals for Center employment and for selecting contractors and the direction, control, and performance management of Center employees and oversight of contractors; and
4. **Strategic planning** and project execution and management, including the responsibility for:
 - a. **Strategic planning functions** such as the following: determination of project requirements, approval of a project implementation strategy, and the development and monitoring of agreements and statements of work with subrecipients, vendors, third-party contributors and other strategic partners; and
 - b. **Project execution** and management functions such as submission of required financial and technical reports, maintenance of a functioning financial management system that satisfies the requirements found in 2 C.F.R. Section 200.302, in order to ensure that costs charged against an MEP award are reasonable, allocable, and allowable under applicable federal cost principles; and adherence to the terms and conditions of the MEP award.

In extraordinary situations, the NIST Grants Officer may allow a recipient to temporarily outsource its management and oversight responsibilities under an MEP award. If an applicant is proposing such a structure, the applicant must include with its application a detailed explanation and accompanying documentation (e.g., copies of draft contracts or other agreements) supporting its outsourcing request.

- b. MEP Center Oversight Board.** Each Center shall establish and maintain an oversight board that is broadly representative of local stakeholders with a majority of board members drawn from local small- and medium-sized manufacturing firms. Members of a Center's oversight board may not concurrently serve on more than one Center's oversight board. If a Center's oversight board does not meet the requirements of this paragraph at any time during the term of an MEP award, the Center must disclose the deficiencies to the FPO and must submit a detailed plan to the FPO for bringing its oversight board into compliance with this term within 12 months. Additionally, each Center oversight board shall adopt bylaws governing the operation of the board, including a conflict of interest policy to ensure relevant relationships are disclosed and proper recusal procedures are in place. Upon request, a Center shall provide the FPO and/or NIST Grants Officer with copies of its organizational documents, including articles of incorporation or charters, ratified by-laws and conflict of interest policies.

If such a structure is not currently in place, or is not expected to meet these requirements at the time of the MEP award, the applicant should propose a feasible plan for developing such an oversight board within 12 months of issuance of an MEP award. Please refer to Section 7 of the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership General Terms and Conditions for further information
<http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>

IV. Application and Submission Information

- 1. Address to Request Application Package.** The standard application package, consisting of the standard forms, i.e., SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, SF-LLL, and the CD-511, is available at www.grants.gov. Applicants may also request an application package by contacting the point of contact for administrative, budget, cost-sharing, eligibility questions and other programmatic questions listed in Section VII. of this FFO.
- 2. Content and Form of Application/Submission.** The requirements given in this section of the FFO will be used in lieu of those given in the MEP regulations found at 15 CFR part 290, specifically 15 CFR § 290.5(a).
- a. Required Forms and Documents**

- (1) **SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance.** Applicants must indicate the State in which they are seeking to establish an MEP Center in field 4, Applicant Identifier, of the SF-424. The SF-424 must be certified through www.grants.gov by an authorized representative of the applicant organization.

SF-424, Item 12, should list the FFO number 2015-NIST-MEP-01.

SF-424, Item 18, should list the total budget information for full five (5) years of the project.

The list of certifications and assurances referenced in Item 21 of the SF-424 is contained in the SF-424B.

- (2) **SF-424A, Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs.** The budget should reflect anticipated expenses for all five (5) years of the project, considering all potential cost increases, including cost of living adjustments. Recipients must meet the minimum cost share and matching requirements set forth in this FFO. Please refer to Section III.2. of this FFO for the Cost Share and Matching Requirement over the life of the award. The budget should also include staff, travel and other costs associated with the NIST/MEP Kick-Off Conference and System-Wide meetings as described in Sections II.5. and II.6. of this FFO.

The applicant should submit two SF-424A forms. The first SF-424A form should cover the first four (4) years of the project and is the SF424A form that appears as part of the mandatory forms in the Grants.gov application package.

The second SF-424A form should be submitted to cover year five (5) of the project, and its submission details are found in in Section IV.2.a.(10). of this FFO.

- (3) **SF-424B, Assurances - Non-Construction Programs.**
- (4) **CD-511, Certification Regarding Lobbying.**
- (5) **SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities.** (if applicable)
- (6) **Technical Proposal.** The five (5) year Technical Proposal is a word-processed document not exceeding 40 pages responsive to the program description (see Section I. of this FFO) and the evaluation criteria (see Section V.1. of this FFO). The following is a suggested format that applicants may use for the technical proposal.
 - a) **Table of Contents.** (Does not count toward the page limit).
 - b) **Executive Summary.** The executive summary should briefly (usually no longer than two pages) describe the proposed project, consistent with the evaluation sub-criteria (see Section V.1.a. of this FFO). Applicants should name the State in which they are seeking to establish an MEP Center in the first sentence of the Executive Summary.

Please note, if an applicant's proposal is selected for funding, NIST

may use all or a portion of the Executive Summary as part of a press release issued by NIST, or for other public information and outreach purposes. Applicants are advised not to incorporate information that concerns business trade secrets or other confidential commercial or financial information as part of the Executive Summary. See *also* 15 C.F.R. § 4.9(c) concerning the designation of business information by the applicant. (Does not count towards page limit).

- c) **Project Narrative.** A description of the proposed approach to establish an MEP Center. The project narrative must also identify tasks, measureable milestones and outcomes in providing manufacturing extension services to primarily small and medium-sized manufacturers separately for each of the five years in the designated State (see Section II.2. of this FFO), sufficient to permit evaluation of the application, in accordance with the Executive Summary and Project Narrative evaluation sub-criteria (see Section V.1.a. of this FFO). If relevant, an applicant should provide information that helps the reviewers understand the past experience of the applicant in serving small and mid-sized manufacturers.

- d) **Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel and Organizational Structure.** A description of the qualifications and proposed Center operational or management activities of key personnel who will be assigned to work on the proposed project, and a description of program management plans, sufficient to permit evaluation of the application, in accordance with the Qualifications of the Applicant sub-criteria (see Sections V.1.a.iv., V.1.b.i. and ii. of this FFO. The applicant should include a description of its proposed performance of the MEP Core Management and Oversight Functions as described in Section III.3.a. of this FFO. The applicant should also provide a description of the proposed MEP Center Oversight Board, including a listing of the members or intended members and a discussion of the governing documents (e.g., bylaws, policies or procedures and conflict of interest policies) with enough information for NIST to determine whether the proposed Oversight Board meets the requirements of Section III.3.b. of this FFO. If an applicant's oversight board does not currently meet the requirements set forth in Section III.3.b. of this FFO or is not expected to continue to meet these requirements at the time of the MEP award, the applicant must provide a plan to bring its oversight board into compliance with Section III.3.b. of the FFO by no later than 12 months following the issuance of the MEP award (expected to be made in January 2016).

- e) **Budget Tables and Budget Narratives.** In addition to the two SF-424A forms (see Sections IV.2.a.(2). and IV.2.a.(9). of this FFO), applicants must provide a detailed budget table and budget narrative

for year one (1) of the project, fully explaining and justifying all proposed project funding (both revenue and expenses) in accordance with applicable federal cost principles. Applicants must also provide a budget table for years two (2) through five (5) of the project; however, a budget narrative for these years is not required as part of an application.

In the budget narrative, the recipient should provide adequate information to support the costs identified in each category of the budget table. For example, providing the annual salary and the percentage of time dedicated to the project by personnel to demonstrate the total cost of that individual; providing the airfare, lodging, per diem, number of days and number of travelers for each proposed trip; and identifying anticipated subaward/contract amounts, the subawardees/contractors, if known at the time of application, and a detailed description of the purpose of each subaward/contract. Applicants must also include staff, travel and related expenses for the required MEP kick-off conference and meetings described in Sections II.5. and II.6. of this FFO in the budget tables and budget narratives. A suggested budget table and budget narrative template are available on the MEP website, <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>.

This budget information submitted by an applicant will be evaluated in accordance with the Budget Narrative and Financial Plan evaluation sub-criteria (see Section V.1.c.i. and ii. of this FFO).

(7) Letters of Commitment or Support. The letters of commitment or support identified below do not count toward the overall application page limit. In obtaining letters of commitment, please note that it is inappropriate for Federal employees to critique or provide feedback on project ideas, etc., and it is also inappropriate for Federal employees to provide a letter of support.

a) For non-profit applicants with a fiduciary board of directors, a resolution from such board authorizing submission of the MEP Center application to NIST and supporting the activities described therein is required.

b) Applicant and Third-Party Non-Federal Cost Sharing: With the exception of a commitment letter from the applicant, letters of commitment for all other third-party sources of non-Federal cost sharing identified in a proposal are not required, but are strongly encouraged. Applications without commitment letters for each item of third-party, non-federal cost sharing may be considered less favorably during the application review process. Applicants may submit a summary listing of non-Federal cost share, which will not be counted toward the page limit.

(i) Applicant Non-Federal Cost Sharing (Cash and In-kind): A letter of commitment is required from an authorized representative of the applicant, stating the total amount of cost share to be contributed by the applicant towards the proposed MEP Center project separate and apart from the submission of the proposal. This stand-alone letter must cover all five (5) years of the proposed MEP Center project and include a per year break-out of the applicant's contribution of non-federal cost share, as well as a per year break-out of cash cost share (including anticipated program income) and in-kind (non-cash) contributions.

(ii) Third Party Cost Sharing (Cash and In-kind): The applicant is strongly encouraged to include in its application a letter of commitment from an authorized representative of each third-party organization providing cash or in-kind contributions that are to be used as cost share under the proposed MEP Center project. Any such letter(s) should clearly state: whether the third-party contribution will consist of cash contributions, in-kind contributions, or a combination thereof; the total amount of the contribution, including a break-out of cash versus in-kind contributions (as applicable); the time period over which the third-party contribution will be made; and any interim performance requirements for phased contributions.

c) Subrecipients: Letters of commitment from subrecipients who are key to the technical plan's success are useful for verifying the availability of resources, but are not required. Applications without commitment letters from all identified, proposed key subrecipients may be considered less favorably during the application review process. The applicant should include information regarding any planned cost share contribution from a subrecipient in their letter of commitment. If an award is issued, the recipient is ultimately the entity that is committing to the cost share being obtained from the subrecipient.

If a subrecipient fails to meet the cost share expectations, the award recipient is required to meet the shortfall. In addition, applicants planning to use subawards are responsible for evaluating the financial viability of subrecipients to meet proposed cost share levels.

d) Prospective Key Employees: Letters of commitment to join the proposing organization's team are useful for verifying the availability of key employees, who are not yet employed at a proposing organization, to participate in the project if the project is funded. These letters are not required, but they can play an important role in

conveying the qualifications of key employees, especially for projects involving small companies or startups. Applications without commitment letters from all prospective key employees may be considered less favorably during the application review process.

- e) **Contractors:** Letters of commitment from contractors who are key to the technical plan's success are useful for verifying the availability of resources, but are not required. Applications without commitment letters from all identified, proposed key contractors may be considered less favorably during the application review process. Contractors may not contribute cost share towards the project.
- f) **General Letters of Support:** General letters of support are not required, but may be useful for illustrating broad-based support for the applicant's proposal.

- (8) **Indirect Cost Rate Agreement.** If indirect costs are included in the proposed budget, provide a copy of the approved negotiated agreement if this rate was negotiated with a cognizant Federal audit agency. If the rate was not established by a cognizant Federal audit agency, provide a statement to this effect. If the successful applicant includes indirect costs in the budget and has not established an indirect cost rate with a cognizant Federal audit agency, the applicant will be required to obtain such a rate in accordance with the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions available at:
http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants_management/policy/default%20p2.htm.
This does not count toward the page limit.

Alternatively, in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.414(f), applicants that have never received a negotiated indirect cost rate may elect to charge indirect costs to an MEP award pursuant to a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC), in which case a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement is not required. Applicants proposing a 10 percent de minimis rate pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 200.414(f) should note this election as part of the budget portion of the application.

- (9) **Resumes.** One-page resumes of no more than five key personnel may be included; these do not count toward the page limit. Any information beyond one page for each resume and any additional resumes submitted will not be considered.
- (10) **SF-424A, Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs for year five (5).** The SF-424A form that appears as part of the mandatory forms in the Grants.gov application package covers the first four (4) years of the project. The second SF-424A form should be submitted to cover year five (5) of the project. A fillable SF-424A form can be found at

<http://www.nist.gov/director/grants/upload/sf424a.pdf>. Applicants should download the fillable SF-424A form, complete the information for year five (5) of the project and submit the completed form as an attachment, using the procedure described in the next paragraph.

When submitting the application electronically via Grants.gov, items IV.2.a.(1). through IV.2.a.(5). above are part of the standard application package in Grants.gov and can be completed through the download application process. **Items IV.2.a.(6). through IV.2.a.(10). must be completed and attached by clicking on “Add Attachments” found in item 15 of the SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance. This will create a zip file that allows for transmittal of the documents electronically via Grants.gov.** Applicants should carefully follow specific Grants.gov instructions at www.grants.gov to ensure the attachments will be accepted by the Grants.gov system. ***A receipt from Grants.gov indicating an application is received does not provide information about whether attachments have been received.***

b. Application Format

- (1) **E-mail submissions.** Will not be accepted.
- (2) **Facsimile submissions (fax).** Will not be accepted.
- (3) **Figures, graphs, images, and pictures.** Should be of a size that is easily readable or viewable and may be landscape orientation.
- (4) **Font.** Easy to read font (11-point minimum). Smaller type may be used in figures and tables but must be clearly legible.
- (5) **Line spacing.** Single.
- (6) **Margins.** One (1) inch top, bottom, left, and right.
- (7) **Paper copies.** Will not be accepted. All submissions must be made via www.grants.gov.
- (8) **Page layout.** Portrait orientation only (except figures, graphs, and pictures (see Section IV.2.b.(3))).
- (9) **Page Limit.** Forty (40) pages.

Page limit includes: Cover page, Technical Proposal (with the exception of the Executive Summary), figures, graphs, tables, images, pictures, and all other pages of an application, with the exception of the page limit exclusions listed below.

Page limit excludes: Table of Contents, Executive Summary, SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance; both copies of the SF-424A, Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs form; SF-424B, Assurances – Non-Construction Programs; SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities; CD-511, Certification Regarding Lobbying; Table of Contents, budget tables and budget narratives; Letters of Commitment and/or Support; Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, and Resumes.

(10) Page numbering. Number pages sequentially.

(11) Paper size. 21.6 centimeters by 27.9 centimeters (8 ½ inches by 11 inches).

(12) Application language. English.

(13) Typed document. All applications, including forms, must be typed.

c. Application Replacement Pages. Applicants may not submit replacement pages and/or missing documents once an application has been submitted. Any revisions must be made by submission of a new application that must be received by NIST by the submission deadline.

d. Pre-Applications. NIST is not accepting pre-applications or white papers under this FFO.

e. Certifications Regarding Federal Felony and Federal Criminal Tax Convictions, Unpaid Federal Tax Assessments and Delinquent Federal Tax Returns. In accordance with Federal appropriations law, an authorized representative of the selected applicant(s) may be required to provide certain pre-award certifications regarding federal felony and federal criminal tax convictions, unpaid federal tax assessments, and delinquent federal tax returns.

3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM). Pursuant to 2 C.F.R. part 25, applicants and recipients (as the case may be) are required to: (i) be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) provide a valid unique entity identifier in its application; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency, unless otherwise excepted from these requirements pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 25.110. NIST will not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time that NIST is ready to make a Federal award pursuant to this FFO, NIST may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

4. **Submission Dates and Times.** Applicants must submit applications electronically through www.grants.gov. Electronic applications must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, June 1, 2015.

Applications not received by the specified due date and time will not be considered and will be returned without review. NIST will consider the date and time stamped on the validation generated by www.grants.gov as the official submission time.

NIST will not accept applications submitted by mail, facsimile, or by email.

NIST strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the last minute to submit an application. NIST will not make any allowances for late submissions resulting from an applicants' inability to register with Sam.gov or Grants.gov in a timely manner. The responsibility for ensuring a complete application is received by NIST by the deadline is the sole responsibility of the applicant. To avoid any potential processing backlogs due to last minute Grants.gov registrations, applicants are strongly encouraged to start their Grants.gov registration process at least four (4) weeks prior to the application due date.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind that (1) a free annual registration process in the electronic System for Award Management (SAM) (see Section IV.3. of this FFO) may take between three (3) and five (5) business days or as long as more than two (2) weeks, and (2) applicants using Grants.gov will receive a series of receipts over a period of up to two business days before learning via a validation or rejection whether a Federal agency's electronic system has received its application.

5. **Intergovernmental Review.** Applications under this Program are not subject to Executive Order 12372.
6. **Funding Restrictions.** Construction activities are not an allowable cost under the MEP Program. In addition, a recipient or a subrecipient may not charge profits, fees or other increments above cost to an MEP award. Pre-award costs under this FFO are subject to the prior written approval of the NIST Grants Officer.
7. **Other Submission Requirements**
 - a. **Applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov.** NIST will not accept applications submitted by mail, facsimile, or by e-mail.

(1) Electronic applications must be submitted via Grants.gov at www.grants.gov, under announcement 2015-NIST-MEP-01.

- a) Submitters of electronic applications should carefully follow specific Grants.gov instructions to ensure the attachments will be accepted by the Grants.gov system. A receipt from Grants.gov indicating an application is

received does not provide information about whether attachments have been received. For further information or questions regarding applying electronically for the 2015-NIST-MEP-01 announcement, contact Christopher Hunton by phone at 301-975-5718 or by e-mail at christopher.hunton@nist.gov.

- b) Applicants are strongly encouraged to start early and not wait until the approaching due date before logging on and reviewing the instructions for submitting an application through Grants.gov. The Grants.gov registration process must be completed before a new registrant can apply electronically. If all goes well, the registration process takes three (3) to five (5) business days. If problems are encountered, the registration process can take up to two (2) weeks or more. Applicants must have a valid unique entity identifier number and must maintain a current registration in the Federal government's primary registrant database, the System for Award Management (<https://www.sam.gov/>), as explained on the Grants.gov Web site. See also Section IV.3. of this FFO. After registering, it may take several days or longer from the initial log-on before a new Grants.gov system user can submit an application. Only authorized individual(s) will be able to submit the application, and the system may need time to process a submitted application. Applicants should save and print the proof of submission they receive from Grants.gov. If problems occur while using Grants.gov, the applicant is advised to (a) print any error message received and (b) call Grants.gov directly for immediate assistance. If calling from within the United States or from a U.S. territory, please call 800-518-4726. If calling from a place other than the United States or a U.S. territory, please call 606-545-5035. Assistance from the Grants.gov Help Desk will be available around the clock every day, with the exception of Federal holidays. Help Desk service will resume at 7:00 a.m. Eastern Time the day after Federal holidays. For assistance using Grants.gov, you may also contact support@grants.gov.
- c) To find instructions on submitting an application on Grants.gov, Applicants should refer to the "Applicants" tab in the banner just below the top of the www.grants.gov home page. Clicking on the "Applicants" tab produces the "Grant Applicants" page.

In addition to following the "Steps" and instructions described in the "Applicant Actions" section and its sub-categories, further detailed instructions are described in "Applicant Resources" and all of its subcategories. This appears in the box near the top left of the Grant Applicants page. Applicants should follow the links associated with each subcategory.

Applicants will receive a series of receipts during a process of up to two business days before the application is either validated as electronically

received by the Federal agency system, or rejected by it. Closely following the detailed information in these subcategories will increase the likelihood of acceptance of the application by the Federal agency's electronic system.

Applicants should pay close attention to the instructions under "Applicant FAQs," as it contains information important to successful submission on Grants.gov, including essential details on the naming conventions for attachments to Grants.gov applications.

All applicants should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicants' schedules for delivery of their application. Applicants are advised that volume on Grants.gov may be extremely heavy on the deadline date.

Refer to important information in Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times, to help ensure your application is received on time.

b. Amendments. Any amendments to this FFO will be announced through Grants.gov. Applicants may sign up on Grants.gov to receive amendments by email or may request copies from Margaret Robb by telephone at (301) 975-4176 or by e-mail to mepffo@nist.gov. Since this opportunity is also announced in the Federal Register, any amendments to that notice will be published in the Federal Register. Copies of the Federal Register announcement and any amendments published in the Federal Register can be found at <https://www.federalregister.gov/> and may also be requested from Margaret Robb by telephone at (301) 975-4176 or by e-mail to mepffo@nist.gov.

V. Application Review Information

1. Evaluation Criteria. The evaluation criteria, selection factors, review and selection process provided in this section will be used for this competition in lieu of those provided in the MEP regulations found at 15 CFR part 290, specifically 15 CFR §§ 290.6 and 290.7. The evaluation criteria that will be used in evaluating applications and assigned weights, with a maximum score of 100, are listed below.

a. Executive Summary and Project Narrative. (40 points; Sub-criteria i through iv will be weighted equally) NIST/MEP will evaluate the extent to which the applicant's Executive Summary and Project Narrative demonstrates how the applicant's methodology will efficiently and effectively establish an MEP Center and provide manufacturing extension services to primarily small and medium-sized manufacturers in the applicable State-wide geographical service area identified in Section II.2. of this FFO. Applicants should name the state to be covered in the first sentence of the Executive Summary and Project Narrative. Reviewers will consider the following topics when evaluating the Executive Summary and Project Narrative:

- i. **Center Strategy.** Reviewers will assess the applicant's strategy proposed for the Center to deliver services that support a strong manufacturing ecosystem, meet manufacturers' needs and generate impact. Reviewers will assess the quality with which the applicant:
- incorporates the market analysis described in the criterion V.1.a.ii.(1). below to inform strategies, products and services;
 - defines a strategy for delivering services that balances market penetration with impact and revenue generation, addressing the needs of manufacturers, with an emphasis on the small and medium-sized manufacturers;
 - Defines the Center's existing and/or proposed roles and relationships with other entities in the State's manufacturing ecosystem, including State, regional, and local agencies, economic development organizations and educational institutions such as universities and community or technical colleges, industry associations, and other appropriate entities;
 - plans to engage with other entities in Statewide and/or regional advanced manufacturing initiatives; and
 - supports achievements of the MEP mission and objectives while also satisfying the interests of other stakeholders, investors, and partners.
- ii. **Market Understanding.** Reviewers will assess the strategy proposed for the Center to define the target market, understand the needs of manufacturers (especially Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs)), and to define appropriate services to meet identified needs. Reviewers will evaluate the proposed approach for regularly updating this understanding through the five years. The following sub-topics will be evaluated and given equal weight:
- (1) **Market Segmentation.** Reviewers will assess the quality and extent of the applicant's market segmentation including:
- company size, geography, industry including a segmentation of rural, emerging, start-up and very small manufacturers as appropriate to the state;
 - alignment with state and/or regional initiatives; and
 - other important factors identified by the applicant.
- (2) **Needs Identification and Product/Service Offerings.** Reviewers will assess the quality and extent of the applicant's proposed needs identification and proposed products and services for both sales growth and operational improvement in response to the applicant's market segmentation and understanding assessed by reviewers under the preceding Section V.1.a.ii.1. Of particular interest is how the applicant would leverage new manufacturing technologies, techniques and processes usable by small and medium-sized manufacturers. Reviewers will also consider how an applicant's proposed approach will support a job-driven training agenda with manufacturing clients.

iii. **Business Model.** Reviewers will assess the applicant's proposed business model for the Center as the applicant provides in its Project Narrative, Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel, Organizational Structure and Budget Tables and Budget Narratives sections of its Technical Proposal, submitted under section IV.2.a.(6) of this FFO, and the proposed business model's ability to execute the strategy evaluated under criterion V.1.a.i. above, based on the market understanding evaluated under criterion V.1.a.ii. above. The following sub-topics will be evaluated and given equal weight:

(1) Outreach and Service Delivery to the Market. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposed Center is organized to:

- identify, reach and provide proposed services to key market segments and individual manufacturers described above;
- work with a manufacturer's leadership in strategic discussions related to new technologies, new products and new markets; and
- leverage the applicant's past experience in working with small and medium-sized manufacturers as a basis for future programmatic success.

(2) Partnership Leverage and Linkages. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposed Center will make effective use of resources or partnerships with third parties such as industry, universities, community/technical colleges, nonprofit economic development organizations, and Federal, State and Local Government Agencies in the Center's business model.

iv. **Performance Measurement and Management.** Reviewers will assess the extent to which the applicant will use a systematic approach to measuring and managing performance including the:

- quality and extent of the applicant's stated goals, milestones and outcomes described by operating year (year 1, year 2, etc.);
- applicant's utilization of client-based business results important to stakeholders in understanding program impact; and
- depth of the proposed methodology for program management and internal evaluation likely to ensure effective operations and oversight for meeting program and service delivery objectives.

b. **Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel and Organizational Structure (30 points; Sub-criteria i and ii will be weighted equally).** Reviewers will assess the ability of the key personnel and the applicant's management structure to deliver the program and services envisioned for the Center. Reviewers will consider the following topics when evaluating the qualifications of the applicant and of program management:

i. Key Personnel. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the:

- proposed key personnel have the appropriate experience and education in manufacturing, outreach and partnership development to support achievements of the MEP mission and objectives;
- proposed key personnel have the appropriate experience and education to plan, direct, monitor, organize and control the monetary resources of the proposed Center to achieve its business objectives and maximize its value;
- proposed staffing plan flows logically from the specified approach to the market and products and service offerings; and
- proposed field staff structure sufficiently supports the geographic concentrations and industry targets for the region.

ii. Organizational Structure. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the:

- proposed management structure (leadership and governance) is aligned to support the execution of the strategy, products and services;
- organizational roles and responsibilities of key personnel and staff are clearly delineated; and
- degree to which the Center's proposed oversight board meets the requirements of Section III.3.b. of this FFO or, if such a structure is not currently in place or is not expected to continue meet these requirements at the time of the MEP award, a feasible plan is proposed for developing such an oversight board within 12 months of issuance of an MEP award (expected to be January 2016).

c. Budget and Financial Plan. (30 points; Sub-criteria i and ii will be weighted equally) Reviewers will assess the suitability and focus of the applicant's five (5) year budget. The application will be assessed in the following areas:

i. Budget. Reviewers will assess the extent to which:

- the proposed financial plan is aligned to support the execution of the proposed Center's strategy and business model over the five (5) year project plan;
- the proposed projections for income and expenditures are appropriate for the scale of services that are to be delivered by the proposed Center and the service delivery model envisioned within the context of the overall financial model over the five (5) year project plan;
- a reasonable ramp-up or scale-up scope and budget that has the Center fully operational by the 4th year of the project; and
- the proposal's narrative for each of the budgeted items explains the rationale for each of the budgeted items, including assumptions the applicant used in budgeting for the Center.

ii. **Quality of the Financial Plan for Meeting the Award's Non-Federal Cost Share Requirements over 5 Years.** Reviewers will assess the quality of and extent to which the:

- applicant clearly describes the total level of cost share and detailed rationale of the cost share, including cash and in-kind, in their proposed budget.
- applicant's funding commitments for cost share are documented by letters of support from the applicant, proposed sub-recipients and any other partners identified and meet the basic matching requirements of the program;
- applicant's cost share meets basic requirements of allowability, allocability and reasonableness under applicable federal costs principles set for in 2 C.F.R. 200, Subpart E;
- applicant's underlying accounting system is established or will be established to meet applicable federal costs principles set for in 2 C.F.R. 200, Subpart E; and
- the overall proposed financial plan is sufficiently robust and diversified so as to support the long term sustainability of the Center throughout the five (5) years of the project plan.

2. Review and Selection Process

Proposals, reports, documents and other information related to applications submitted to NIST and/or relating to financial assistance awards issued by NIST will be reviewed and considered by Federal employees, Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel enter into nondisclosure agreements covering such information.

a. Initial Administrative Review of Applications. An initial review of timely received applications will be conducted to determine eligibility, completeness, and responsiveness to this FFO and the scope of the stated program objectives. Applications determined to be ineligible, incomplete, and/or non-responsive may be eliminated from further review. However, NIST, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for an application that is missing non-substantive information that can easily be rectified or cured.

b. Full Review of Eligible, Complete, and Responsive Applications. Applications that are determined to be eligible, complete, and responsive will proceed for full reviews in accordance with the review and selection processes below. Eligible, complete and responsive applications will be grouped by the State in which the proposed MEP Center is to be established. The applications in each group will be reviewed by the same reviewers and will be evaluated, reviewed, and selected as described below in separate groups.

(1) Evaluation and Review. Each application will be reviewed by at least three technically qualified individual reviewers who will evaluate each application

based on the evaluation criteria (see Section V.1. of this FFO). Applicants may receive written follow-up questions in order for the reviewers to gain a better understanding of the applicant's proposal. Each reviewer will assign each application a numeric score, with a maximum score of 100. If a non-Federal reviewer is used, the reviewers may discuss the applications with each other, but scores will be determined on an individual basis, not as a consensus.

Applicants whose applications receive an average score of 70 or higher out of 100 will be deemed finalists. If deemed necessary, all finalists will be invited to participate with reviewers in a conference call and/or all finalists will be invited to participate in a site visit that will be conducted by the same reviewers at the applicant's location. Finalists will be reviewed and evaluated, and reviewers may revise their assigned numeric scores based on the evaluation criteria (see Section V.1. of this FFO) as a result of the conference call and/or site visit.

(2) Ranking and Selection. The reviewers' final numeric scores for all finalists will be converted to ordinal rankings (i.e., a reviewer's highest score will be ranked "1", second highest score will be ranked "2", etc.). The ordinal rankings for an applicant will be summed and rank order will be established based on the lowest total for the ordinal rankings, and provided to the Selecting Official for further consideration.

The Selecting Official is the NIST Associate Director of Innovation and Industry Services or designee. The Selecting Official makes the final recommendation to the NIST Grants Officer regarding the funding of applications under this FFO. NIST/MEP expects to recommend funding for the highest ranked applicant for each of the twelve (12) States being competed under this FFO. However, the Selecting Official may decide to select an applicant out of rank order based upon one or more of the Selection Factors identified in Section V.3. of this FFO. The Selecting Official may also decide not to recommend funding for a particular State to any of the applicants.

NIST reserves the right to negotiate the budget costs with any applicant selected to receive an award, which may include requesting that the applicant remove certain costs. Additionally, NIST may request that the successful applicant modify objectives or work plans and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to award. NIST also reserves the right to reject an application where information is uncovered that raises a reasonable doubt as to the responsibility of the applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NIST Grants Officer. The award decisions of the NIST Grants Officer are final.

c. Federal Awarding Agency Review of Risk Posed by Applicants. After applications are proposed for funding by the Selecting Official and prior to the issuance of an award, the NIST Grants Office will conduct an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.205. In addition to

reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualification or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NIST may consider items such as the financial stability of an applicant, quality of the applicant's management systems, an applicant's history of performance, previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities. Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that correspond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NIST Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 200.207. In addition, NIST reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of the applicant.

3. Selection Factors. The Selection Factors for this FFO are as follows:

- a. The availability of Federal funds;
- b. Relevance of the proposed project to MEP program goals and policy objectives;
- c. Reviewers' evaluations, including technical comments;
- d. The need to assure appropriate distribution of MEP services within the designated State;
- e. Whether the project duplicates other projects funded by DoC or by other Federal agencies; and
- f. Whether the application complements or supports other Administration priorities, or projects supported by DoC or other Federal agencies, such as but not limited to the National Network for Manufacturing Innovation and the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership.

4. Anticipated Announcement and Award Date. Review, selection, and award processing is expected to be completed in late 2015. The anticipated start date for awards made under this FFO is expected to be January 1, 2016.

5. Additional Information

- a. **Notification to Unsuccessful Applicants.** Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing.
- b. **Retention of Unsuccessful Applications.** An electronic copy of each non-selected application will be retained for three (3) years for record keeping purposes. After three (3) years, it will be destroyed.

VI. Federal Award Administration Information

1. **Federal Award Notices.** Successful applicants will receive an award package from the NIST Grants Officer. The award cover page, i.e., CD-450, Financial Assistance Award is the authorizing document available at http://ocio.os.doc.gov/s/groups/public/@doc/@os/@ocio/@oitpp/documents/content/dev01_002513.pdf.
2. **Administrative and National Policy Requirements**
 - a. **Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements.** Through 2. C.F.R. § 1327.101, the Department of Commerce adopted the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, which apply to awards made pursuant to this FFO. Refer to <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=bd58a13de66200ce25c4fa5f6fdbf197&node=pt2.1.200&rqn=div5> and <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=bd58a13de66200ce25c4fa5f6fdbf197&node=pt2.1.1327&rqn=div5>.
 - b. **Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions.** The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions (December 26, 2014) will apply to this award and are accessible at: http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants_management/policy/default%20p2.htm.
 - c. **Pre-Award Notification Requirements.** The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements, 79 FR 78390 (December 30, 2014), are applicable to this FFO and are available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf>.
 - d. **Funding Availability and Limitation of Liability.** Funding for the program listed in this FFO is contingent upon the availability of appropriations. In no event will NIST or DoC be responsible for application preparation costs if this program fails to receive funding or is cancelled because of agency priorities. Publication of this FFO does not oblige NIST or DoC to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.
 - e. **Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership General Terms and Conditions.** As a recipient of a NIST/MEP award, the recipient shall comply with the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership General Terms and Conditions (MEP Terms and Conditions), as may be periodically amended. The MEP General Terms and Conditions in effect at the time the awards are made will be incorporated into the awards. A copy of the current MEP General Terms and Conditions is available at: <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>. Award recipients will also be required to comply with any Special Award Conditions imposed by the NIST/MEP Grants Officer.

- f. **Operating Plan, Budget and Supporting Documentation.** Following the issuance of an MEP award, recipients will be required to submit an Operating Plan in accordance with the MEP Operating Plan Guidelines in effect at the time the award is made. In this connection, NIST may require recipients to provide copies of sub-tier agreements, including subawards and contracts over \$150,000, as well subrecipient performance monitoring plans. A copy of the current MEP Operating Plan Guidelines is available at: <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>.

3. Reporting

- a. **Reporting Requirements.** In lieu of the reporting requirements described in Sections A.01 Performance (Technical) Reports and B.02 Financial Reports of the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions (December 26, 2014), the following reporting requirements shall apply:

(1) **Financial Reports.** The Recipient shall submit an SF-425, Federal Financial Report, into the MEP's Enterprise Information System (MEIS) on a semi-annual basis after the sixth and twelfth month of each operating year, unless other reporting intervals and/or due dates are identified by the NIST Grants Officer pursuant to a Special Award Condition. Reports will be due within 30 days after the end of each semi-annual reporting period. The Recipient shall submit a final SF-425 within 90 days after the expiration date of the award.

(2) **Performance (Technical) Reports.** The Recipient shall submit a Technical Report (completing all required MEIS fields) on a semi-annual basis after the sixth and twelfth month of each operating year, unless other reporting intervals and/or due dates are identified by the NIST Grants Officer pursuant to a Special Award Condition. Reports are due in MEIS no later than 30 days following the end of each reporting period. The Recipient shall submit a final Technical/Quarterly report within 90 days after the expiration date of the award. Technical/Quarterly Report details are accessible on the MEIS website (<https://meis.nist.gov/>). Technical progress reports shall contain information as prescribed in the NIST MEP Reporting Guidelines (OMB Control Number 0693-0032). For further information regarding the NIST MEP Reporting Process, you may download a copy of the NIST MEP Reporting Guidelines at <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>.

(3) **Post Client Project Follow-Up.** The recipient will be required to provide client and project data on a quarterly basis (unless otherwise directed by the NIST Grants Officer) and in a specified format to the organization identified by NIST/MEP in order for post-project follow-up data to be obtained (OMB Control Number 0693-0021). For further information regarding the NIST MEP Reporting Process, you may download a copy of the NIST MEP Reporting Guidelines at <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>.

- b. Audit Requirements.** A non-Federal entity (as defined in 2 C.F.R. § 200.69) that expends \$750,000 or more in Federal award funds during the non-federal entity's fiscal year is required to conduct a single or program-specific audit in accordance with the requirements set forth in 2 C.F.R. part 200, Subpart F. In addition, pursuant to Section F. of the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions (December 26, 2014), non-Federal entities that are not subject to Subpart F of 2 C.F.R. Part 200 (e.g., for-profit entities) and that expend \$750,000 or more in Department of Commerce award during their fiscal year must have an audit conducted for that year in accordance with Subpart F of 2 C.F.R. Part 200, unless otherwise specified in the terms and conditions of an award, Applicants are reminded that NIST, the DoC Office of Inspector General or another authorized Federal agency may conduct an audit of an award at any time.
- c. Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006.** In accordance with 2 C.F.R. Part 170, all recipients of a Federal award made on or after October 1, 2010, are required to comply with reporting requirements under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (Pub. L. No. 109-282). In general, all recipients are responsible for reporting sub-awards of \$25,000 or more. In addition, recipients that meet certain criteria are responsible for reporting executive compensation. Applicants must ensure they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements should they receive funding.
- d. Performance Reviews.** NIST will perform program evaluations of the recipient as follows: (1) in an annual review, as required by 15 CFR § 290.8, and (2) an independent peer review during the third year of operation and at least every two years thereafter, as required by 15 U.S.C. 278k(c)(5) and 15 C.F.R § 290.8.

VII. Federal Awarding Agency Contact(s)

Questions should be directed to the following contact persons:

Subject Area	Point of Contact
Administrative, budget, cost-sharing, eligibility questions and other programmatic questions.	Diane Henderson Phone: (301) 975-5105 Fax: (301) 963-6556 E-mail: mepffo@nist.gov
Technical Assistance with Grants.gov Submissions	Christopher Hunton Phone: (301) 975-5718 Fax: (301) 975-8884 E-mail: christopher.hunton@nist.gov
Grant Rules and Regulations	Jannet Cancino Phone: (301) 975-6544

Subject Area	Point of Contact
	Fax: (301) 975-6368 E-mail: jannet.cancino@nist.gov

VIII. Other Information

- 1. Webinar Information Session:** NIST/MEP will hold one or more webinar information sessions for organizations that are considering applying to this opportunity. These webinars will provide general information regarding MEP and offer general guidance on preparing proposals. NIST/MEP staff will be available on the webinars to answer general questions. During the webinars, proprietary technical discussions about specific project ideas will not be permitted. Also, NIST/MEP staff will not critique or provide feedback on any project ideas during the webinars or at any time before submission of a proposal to MEP. However, NIST/MEP staff will provide information about the MEP eligibility and cost-sharing requirements, evaluation criteria and selection factors, selection process, and the general characteristics of a competitive MEP proposal during this webinar, and by phone and email. The webinars will be held approximately fifteen (15) to thirty (30) business days after posting of this FFO and publication of an abbreviated solicitation in the *Federal Register*. The exact dates and times of the webinars will be posted on the MEP website at <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>. The webinars will be recorded and a link to the recordings will be posted on the MEP website. In addition, the webinar presentations will be available after the webinars on the MEP website. Organizations wishing to participate in one or more webinars must sign up by emailing mepffo@nist.gov. Participation in the webinars is not required in order for an organization to submit an application pursuant to this FFO.
- 2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).** Questions from applicants pertaining to MEP eligibility, cost-sharing requirements, evaluation criteria and selection factors, selection process, and the general characteristics of a competitive MEP proposal will not be considered on an informal basis. Applicants must submit all such questions in writing to mepffo@nist.gov. Questions submitted to NIST/MEP may be posted as part of an FAQ document, which will be periodically updated on the MEP website at <http://nist.gov/mep/ffo-state-competitions-02.cfm>.