NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO)

NIST MEP Center State Competition for
Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and South Dakota

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name:** National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), United States Department of Commerce (DoC)

- **Funding Opportunity Title:** Award Competition for Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Centers in the States of Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and South Dakota

- **Announcement Type:** Initial

- **Funding Opportunity Number**: 2022-NIST-MEP-01

- **Assistance Listing (CFDA Number):** 11.611, Manufacturing Extension Partnership

- **Dates:** Full Applications must be received at Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, Tuesday, April 26, 2022. Applications received after this deadline will not be reviewed or considered.

  Applicants should be aware, and factor in their application submission planning, that the Grants.gov system closes periodically for routine maintenance. Applicants should visit Grants.gov for information on any scheduled closures.

  NIST expects to complete its review, selection of successful applicants, and award processing by September 2022. NIST expects the earliest start date for awards under this NOFO to be January 2023.

- **Application Submission Address:** Applications must be submitted using Grants.gov. NIST will not accept applications submitted by mail, facsimile, or by e-mail.

- **Funding Opportunity Description:** The NIST Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), authorized by 15 U.S.C. § 278k, is seeking applications from eligible applicants to enter into cooperative agreements to operate MEP Centers in the States of Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and South Dakota. These MEP Centers will provide manufacturing extension services to small and medium-sized (SMM) manufacturers in the States outlined above. These new

MEP Centers will become part of the MEP National Network™[1], which consists of 51 MEP Centers[2] located in each State and in Puerto Rico, and over 1,400 trusted advisors and experts at more than 385 MEP service locations. When an MEP Center has operated for a period of 10 consecutive years, a competition must be conducted to select an eligible entity to operate the Center. The MEP Centers in the States of Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and South Dakota are each nearing 10 consecutive years of operation. *See* Section I. of this NOFO for additional information regarding the MEP Center program.

- **Anticipated Amounts:** NIST anticipates funding one (1) MEP Center cooperative agreement in each of the following States: Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and South Dakota. Each award will have an initial project performance period of up to five (5) years and will be funded at the following anticipated levels:

MEP Center Location and Assigned Geographical Service Area (by State)	Anticipated Federal Funding for Each Year of the Award	Total Anticipated Federal Funding for 5-Year Award Period
Kentucky	$1,243,500.00	$6,217,500.00
Nebraska	$795,700.00	$3,978,500.00
Rhode Island	$1,204,300.00	$6,021,500.00
South Dakota	$712,200.00	$3,561,000.00

Awards issued pursuant to this NOFO may be renewed by NIST on a non-competitive basis for an additional period of five (5) years at the end of the initial project performance period. Renewal funding for MEP Centers is contingent upon successful annual reviews, as well as panel and Secretarial evaluations in accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g) and 15 C.F.R. § 290.8. In accordance with the multi-year funding policy described in this NOFO, obligated funding amounts may be adjusted higher or lower from year-to-year of an award. *See* Section II.2. of this NOFO for additional information pertaining to the anticipated funding levels for this program.

- **Funding Instrument:** Cooperative Agreement. See Section II.1. of this NOFO for additional information concerning the funding instrument for this award.

- **Eligibility:** Per 15 U.S.C. § 278k(a)(5), eligibility is limited to United States-based nonprofit institutions, or consortium thereof, institutions of higher education, or State, United States territory, local, or tribal governments. As discussed in Section I.3. of this NOFO, NIST generally will not fund applications that propose

[1] https://www.nist.gov/mep
[2] https://www.nist.gov/mep/centers

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. In addition, the applicant must have or propose an Oversight Board or Advisory Committee structure or plan for establishing a board structure within 90 days from the award start date (Refer to Section I.2. of this NOFO). Per 15 U.S.C. § 278k(h)(2), incumbent MEP Centers that have received financial assistance for ten (10) consecutive years and that the Secretary determines are in good standing are eligible to apply under this NOFO. *See* Section III.1. of this NOFO for additional information regarding the eligibility requirements for the MEP Center program.

- **Cost Sharing Requirements:** The MEP Center program requires non-Federal cost share of at least 50 percent of the total annual allowable project costs. *See* Section III.2. of this NOFO for more information on the non-federal cost sharing requirements under the MEP Center program.

- **Informational Forum:** NIST MEP conducted and recorded a virtual information forum on November 22, 2021, 1:00 p.m. EST, which is available via https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2021/11/nist-mep-fy-2022-virtual-state-center-competition-information-forum.

  During the informational forum, NIST MEP provided general information regarding MEP and offered guidance on preparing proposals. Additional information provided during these forums included: MEP eligibility and cost share requirements, evaluation criteria, selection factors, and application and selection timeline.

- **Public Website, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):** Questions from applicants pertaining to MEP eligibility, cost sharing requirements, evaluation criteria and selection factors, the selection process, and the general characteristics of a competitive MEP proposal must be submitted in writing to mepnofo@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 NIST MEP website at https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022.

- **Webinar Information Session:** NIST will host a virtual webinar on Monday, February 14, 2022 to provide general information regarding this NOFO, offer general guidance on preparing applications, and answer questions. During the webinar, proprietary technical discussions about specific project ideas will not be permitted. Also, NIST MEP staff will not critique or provide feedback on any specific project ideas during the webinars or at any time before submission of a proposal to MEP. There is no cost to attend the webinar. Participation in the

webinar is not required and will not be considered in the review and selection process.

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FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Program Description

The statutory authority for the NIST Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership is 15 U.S.C. § 278k.

1) Background Information

The National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST's) Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Program is a nationwide network of Centers (referred to hereinafter as the MEP National Network™). MEP Centers are located in all 50 States and Puerto Rico and serve 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, and supporting a strong manufacturing workforce. The MEP National Network™ is a diverse network of State, non-profit organizations, and public colleges and universities, comprising more than 1,400 manufacturing experts offering hands-on technical expertise and assistance services that address the critical needs of their local manufacturers that will impact U.S. Manufacturing.

MEP Centers work directly with area manufacturers in each State to provide expertise and services tailored to manufacturers' most critical needs, ranging from process improvement and workforce development to business practices and technology transfer and implementation. 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 manufacturers realize individual business goals. To learn more about the MEP Program, please go to http://www.nist.gov/mep/.

The MEP National Network™ is a unique public-private partnership that delivers comprehensive, proven solutions to U.S. manufacturers. Through collaborations at the federal, State, and local level, MEP Centers work with manufacturers to develop new products and customers, expand and diversify markets, adopt new technology, and enhance value within supply chains. MEP Centers are connected to the National Network to learn and share distinctive practices. NIST encourages applicants to review the resources available through the MEP National Network™, particularly for connecting applicants with potential subrecipients, contractors, or other collaborators.

2) Oversight Board or Advisory Committee

In accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(k), MEP Centers are required to establish either an Oversight Board or an Advisory Committee.

a. Oversight Board

Except as provided in Section I.2.b. immediately below, recipients will be required to establish and maintain an Oversight Board, which has fiduciary responsibility for the governance and operation of the recipient organization. The Oversight Board must be broadly representative of State service area stakeholders with a majority of the Oversight Board members drawn from small and medium-sized manufacturing firms. Members of the Oversight Board may not concurrently serve on more than one MEP Center Oversight Board or serve as a vendor or provide contractual services to the recipient or to a subrecipient. Additionally, recipients shall adopt bylaws or equivalent governance documents setting forth the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of their Oversight Boards, including a conflict of interest policy to ensure relevant relationships are disclosed and appropriate recusal procedures are in place. Upon request, an applicant shall provide the NIST Grants Officer with copies of its organizational documents, including articles of incorporation or charters, ratified bylaws, and conflict of interest policies. The sufficiency of the proposed Oversight or Advisory Committee Board will be evaluated against the applicable evaluation criteria. (see Section V.1.b.ii. of this NOFO).

b. Advisory Committee

A recipient of an MEP Center cooperative agreement that is an institution of higher education, State, local or Tribal governmental entity, where state or Tribal law or policy prohibits compliance with the Oversight Board requirement, may establish an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee must be broadly representative of State service area stakeholders with the majority of its members drawn from small- and medium-sized manufacturing firms and

provide regular strategic, policy, and programmatic input directly to the designated representative of the recipient.

A recipient that is a nonprofit organization with multiple programs and MEP Center program activities are not a primary activity of the applicant may establish an Advisory Committee, instead of an Oversight Board, that conforms to membership requirements as set forth above.

In determining whether the MEP Center is a primary activity of a recipient, MEP will consider unique factors and circumstances such as, but not limited to, (1) the proportion of MEP Center funding (both Federal dollars and non-Federal match) relative to the applicant's funding (or budget) for its other programs and activities, or (2) the duration of other funding sources over time.

Advisory Committee members may not concurrently serve on more than one MEP Center Advisory Committee or serve as a vendor or provide contractual services to the recipient or to a subrecipient. Recipients shall have bylaws or equivalent governance documents setting forth the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of its Advisory Committee, including a conflict-of-interest policy to ensure relevant relationships are disclosed and appropriate recusal procedures are in place. Upon request, an applicant shall provide the NIST Grants Officer copies of the organizational documents for its Advisory Committee, including ratified bylaws and conflict-of-interest policies. The sufficiency of the proposed Oversight or Advisory Committee Board will be evaluated against the applicable evaluation criteria. (see Section V.1.b.ii. of this NOFO).

c. New/Proposed Oversight and/or Advisory Committee

If an Oversight Board or Advisory Committee meeting the requirements of this section is not in place at the time an application is submitted, the applicant must submit a plan for establishing such structure, including Oversight Board or Advisory Committee membership criteria. Upon request, an applicant shall provide the NIST Grants Officer copies of the organizational documents for its proposed Oversight or Advisory Committee including draft bylaws and conflict of interest policies. An awardee will have up to 90 calendar days from the award start date to establish its Oversight Board or the Advisory Committee, as the case may be. The sufficiency of the proposed Oversight or Advisory Committee Board will be evaluated against the applicable evaluation criteria. (see Section V.1.b.ii. of this NOFO).

No Federal award funds will be released to an awardee until the NIST Grants Officer, in consultation with the MEP program Office, determines that its Oversight Board or Advisory Committee is in conformance with the requirements set forth in this section.

3) MEP Core Management and Oversight Functions

An MEP Center operating under an MEP cooperative agreement must possess and always maintain during the 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:

i. 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;
ii. Policy implementation, including the responsibility for determining the content and implementation of financial and program policies and procedures impacting the recipient's MEP project;
iii. 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
iv. Strategic planning and project execution and management, including the responsibility for:
    - 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
    - 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. § 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 certain 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. The sufficiency of the proposed Core Management and Oversight Functions will be evaluated against an evaluation criterion (see Section V.1.b.ii. of this NOFO).

4) MEP Resources

The following competition-related resources are currently available on the MEP website at: https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022.

- NIST MEP Strategic Plan
- Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership Operating Plan Guidelines
- Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership General Terms and Conditions
- MEP Reporting Guidelines
- Required MEP Single-Year Budget Workbook Template
- Required Award Budget Summary Table Template
- Most recent MEP Annual Report
- FY 2021 Oversight Board Standards

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.

II. Federal Award Information

1. Funding Instrument

The funding instrument that will be used is a Cooperative Agreement. Where cooperative agreements are used, the nature of NIST's "substantial involvement" will generally include collaboration with the recipient organization in developing and implementing the approved scope of work, consistent with the definition of cooperative agreement in 2 C.F.R. § 200.1.

2. Funding Availability

NIST anticipates funding one (1) award in each of the following States: Kentucky, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and South Dakota. Each award will have a project performance period of up to five (5) years and will be funded at the following anticipated levels:

MEP Center Location and Assigned Geographical Service Area (by State)	Anticipated Federal Funding for Each Year of the Award	Total Anticipated Federal Funding for 5-Year Award Period
Kentucky	$1,243,500.00	$6,217,500.00
Nebraska	$795,700.00	$3,978,500.00
Rhode Island	$1,204,300.00	$6,021,500.00
South Dakota	$712,200.00	$3,561,000.00

Applicants may propose annual federal funding amounts that are different from the amounts in the table above, provided that the total amount of federal funds requested by an applicant does not exceed the total amount of funds for the five-year award period set forth in the above table.

3. Multi-Year Funding Policy. When a proposal for a multi-year award is approved, funding will usually be provided for only the first year of the program. 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 of the project to the mission and priorities of the program, and the availability of funds, including increases or decreases to amounts of appropriated funding for NIST MEP. 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 Years. Initial awards issued pursuant to this NOFO 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 up to an additional 5 year period at the end of the initial award period. Renewal funding for MEP Centers is contingent upon both successful annual reviews, and panel and Secretarial evaluations in accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k and 15 C.F.R. § 290.8, as well as the project's continued relevance to the mission and priorities of the program, and the availability of funds.

5. Kick-off Conference. A recipient will be required to attend a kickoff conference, which will generally be held within 30 calendar days after the date of the award. The purpose of this kickoff conference is to help ensure that the MEP Center operator has a clear understanding of the program and its components. The kickoff conference may take place at either NIST MEP headquarters in Gaithersburg, MD or virtually. The kickoff conference will take approximately three (3) days and must be attended by the MEP Center Director and up to two additional MEP Center employees. Applicants must include travel and related expenses for the attending the kickoff as part of the budget for Year 1. These costs should be reflected in the SF-424A form. These costs must also be reflected in the budget table and budget narrative for Year 1, which is submitted as part of the budget summary tables and budget narrative section of the Technical Proposal. Representatives from key subrecipients and other key strategic partners may attend the kickoff conference with the prior written approval of the Grants Officer. Applicants proposing to have key subrecipients and/or other key strategy partners attend the kickoff conference should clearly indicate that fact as part of the budget narrative for year one of the project.

6. MEP Network Wide Meetings. NIST MEP typically organizes network-wide meetings several times a year 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. Applicants must include travel and related costs for approximately two (2) MEP network-wide meetings in each of the five (5) project years (2 meetings per year; 10 total meetings over five-year award period). These costs must be reflected in the MEP Single-Year Budget Workbook and Award Budget Summary Table (*See* Section IV.2.a.(8) of this NOFO).

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.(9). of this NOFO.

III. Eligibility Information

1. Eligible Applicants

Per 15 U.S.C. § 278k(a)(5), eligibility is limited to United States-based nonprofit institutions, or consortium thereof, institutions of higher education, or State, United States territory, local, or tribal governments. Per 15 U.S.C. § 278k(h)(2), incumbent MEP Centers that have received financial assistance for ten (10) consecutive years and that the Secretary determines are in good standing are eligible to apply under this NOFO. The eligibility requirements set forth in this NOFO will be used in lieu of, and to the extent they are inconsistent with will supersede, those given in the MEP regulations found at 15 C.F.R. part 290, specifically 15 C.F.R. § 290.5(a)(1).

As discussed in Section I.3) of this NOFO, 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. In addition, the applicant must have or propose an Oversight Board or Advisory Committee structure or plan for establishing a board structure within 90 days from the award start date (Refer to Section I.2.) of this NOFO).

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

The MEP Center program requires non-Federal cost share of at least 50 percent of the total annual allowable project costs. The MEP statute requires Centers to meet this minimum cost share requirement annually. *See* 15 U.S.C.278k(e)(2). There can be no carry over in excess cost share from one year to the next. Program income, as defined in 2 C.F.R. § 200.1, generated

by an MEP Center may be used by the recipient to meet the cost share requirement.

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 in 2 C.F.R. § 200.306. 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. of this NOFO.

As with the federal share, any proposed costs included as non-federal cost sharing must be allowable/eligible cost under this program and under the federal cost principles set forth under 2 C.F.R. Part 200, Subpart E. Non-federal cost sharing incorporated into the budget is subject to audit in the same general manner as federal award funds. See 2 C.F.R. Part 200, Subpart F, for more information on audits.

IV. Application and Submission Information

1. Address to Request Application Package

The application package is available at Grants.gov under Funding Opportunity Number 2022-NIST-MEP-01.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission. The requirements given in this section of the NOFO will be used in lieu of and to the extent they are inconsistent with will supersede those given in the MEP regulations found at 15 C.F.R. Part 290, specifically 15 C.F.R. § 290.5.

a. Required Forms and Documents. The Application must contain the following:

(1) SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance. The SF-424 must be signed by an authorized representative of the applicant organization.

For SF-424, Item 4, must indicate in which State the applicant is seeking to establish an MEP Center.

For SF-424, Item 8.d. Zip/Postal Code field, should reflect the Zip code + 4 (#####-####) format.

For SF-424, Item 12, should list the NOFO number 2022-NIST-MEP-01.

For SF-424, Item 18, should list the total budget information for the duration of the project.

For SF-424, Item 19, mark either line 19a. or 19b. on the SF-424 regarding State review of the application by the Intergovernmental Review State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 12372. *See* Section IV.5. of this NOFO for information regarding the applicability of E.O. 12372 to this program.

For SF-424, Item 21, the list of certifications and assurances is contained in the Federal Financial Assistance Certifications and Representations (Certs and Reps) as part of the SAM.gov entity registration.

(2) SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs. The budget should reflect anticipated expenses for the entire project, considering all potential cost increases, including cost of living adjustments.

a) The applicant should reflect each year of the project, up to the first four (4) years, on the SF-424A form that appears as part of the mandatory forms in the Grants.gov application package. The second SF-424A form must be submitted to cover year five (5) of the project, and its submission details are found in in Section IV.2.a.(9). of this NOFO.

b) In Section A, the Grant Program Function or Activity on Line 1 under Column (a) should be entered as Manufacturing Extension Partnership or an abbreviation thereof. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number on Line 1 under Column (b) should be entered as “11.611”. The total Federal and non-Federal budget amount for the term of the award should be listed in Section A, Line 1, Column (e) and Column (f).

c) Section B, Column (1) of the SF-424A should reflect the costs (Federal share plus non-Federal share) for each object class category, for the first year of the award. Section B, Column (2) of the SF-424A should reflect the costs (Federal share plus non-Federal share) for each object class category, for the second year of the award. Section B, Column (3) of the SF-424A should reflect the costs (Federal share plus non-Federal share) for each object class category, for the third year of the award. Section B, Column (4) of the SF-424A should reflect the costs (Federal share plus

non-Federal share) for each object class category, for the fourth year of the award.

d) Section C must account for all non-Federal Resources / Match for the entire project. For Column (b) enter resources provided by the applicant. If not applicable, leave blank. For Column (c), enter resources provided by one or more states. If not applicable, leave blank. For Column (d) enter resources provided by the other sources (e.g., in-kind contribution, program income). If not applicable, leave blank.

e) Section D requires a breakdown of the first year's Federal and Non-Federal share of the budget by quarter.

f) Section E requires the budget estimate of federal funds needed for each year of the project. The budget estimate for the first year of the award should be entered in Section E, Line 16, Column (b). The budget estimate for the second year of the award should be entered in Section E, Line 16, Column (c). The budget estimate for the third year of the award should be entered in Section E, Line 16, Column (d). And the budget estimate for the fourth year of the award should be entered in Section E, Line 16, Column (e).

(3) SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (for year five of the project). Applications are for five-year projects. 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 https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-family.html near the top of the screen and labeled "Budget Information – Non-Construction Program SF-424A". 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 Section IV.2.b., Attachment of Required Application Documents.

(4) CD-511, Certification Regarding Lobbying. Enter "2022-NIST-MEP-01" in the Award Number field. Enter the title of the application, or an abbreviation of that title, in the Project Name field.

(5) SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (if applicable).

(6) Technical Proposal. The Technical Proposal is a word-processed document of no more than 25 pages that is responsive to the program

description and the evaluation criteria. The following is a suggested format that applicants may use:

a) **Table of Contents.** (Does not count toward the page limit).

b) **Executive Summary.** (Does not count toward the page limit). This section should be no longer than two pages, describing the proposed project, consistent with the evaluation criteria in Section V.1. of this NOFO. 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 that 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 15 C.F.R. § 4.9(c) concerning the designation of business information by the applicant.

c) **Project Narrative.** A description of the proposed approach to establish and to operate an MEP Center. The project narrative must also identify tasks, measurable 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, sufficient to permit evaluation of the application, in accordance with the Project Narrative evaluation sub-criteria (see Section V.1.a. of this NOFO). If relevant, an applicant should provide information that helps the reviewers understand the experience of the applicant in serving small and mid-sized manufacturers.

d) **Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel, Organizational Structure and Oversight Board or Advisory Committee.** 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.b.i. and ii. of this NOFO). The applicant should include a description of its proposed structure for executing the MEP Core Management and Oversight Functions. The applicant must provide enough information for NIST to determine whether the proposed structure meets the requirements of Section I.2. of this NOFO. The applicant should also provide a description of its

established or proposed MEP Center Oversight Board or Advisory Committee, including a listing of the members and their organizational affiliation 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 or Advisory Committee meets the requirements of Section I.2. of this NOFO. If an applicant's Oversight Board or Advisory Committee does not currently meet the requirements set forth in Section I.2. of this NOFO or is not expected to meet these requirements at the time of the MEP award, the applicant must provide a feasible plan to bring its Oversight Board or Advisory Committee into compliance with Section I.2. of the NOFO within 90 days of award start date.

(7) Resumes of Key Personnel (Does not count toward the page limit)**.** Resumes for all key personnel assigned to the project must be provided. Resumes must be a maximum of two pages each. Additional pages beyond the two pages per resume will not be considered during the evaluation of the application.

(8) Budget, Narrative and Justification. (Does not count toward the page limit). In addition to the SF-424A, the MEP Single-Year Budget Workbook must be provided for year one (1) of the award and the Award Budget Summary Table must be provided for years one (1) through five (5) of the award. The MEP Single-Year Budget Workbook includes templates for a detailed budget (revenue and expenses), budget narrative, and budget justification. The Award Budget Summary Table includes a template for a budget summary for years one (1) through five (5), in accordance with applicable Federal cost principles. The MEP Single-Year Budget Workbook and Award Budget Summary Table template (OMB Control Number 0693-0032) are available on the MEP website at: https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022.

Sample budget summary tables and a sample budget narrative are available on the MEP website under "MEP Resources." *See* Section I.4 of this NOFO.

The detailed budget should reflect anticipated expenses with corresponding narratives, and justifications that support all costs identified in the Single-Year Budget Workbook. For example, the personnel category includes position title, employee name, annual salary and percentage of time dedicated to the project, travel includes but is not limited to airfare, lodging, per diem, number of travelers and days for each proposed trip, and any anticipated sub-recipients, contractors, or third-party contributor costs/contributions with a

detailed description of the purpose and how it relates to the overall project. The proposed costs must be consistent with the project scope. The budget must include the required minimum 50 percent non-Federal cost share described in Section III.2 of this NOFO. The budget must also include expenses to attend the required MEP kick-off conference and meetings described in Sections II.5. and II.6. of this NOFO.

The Budget, Narrative, and Justification must clearly identify whether the applicant or any of its subrecipients anticipate generating program income pursuant to the proposed activities (e.g., client service fees). If program income is anticipated under the proposal (including at the subrecipient level), the applicant must identify the anticipated amount of program income, disclose how program income will be expended in the Form SF-424A and in the Budget Narrative and Justification, and will be required to properly report all program income generated pursuant to the project in the Form SF-425.

This section of the application will be evaluated in accordance with the Budget, Narrative, and Justification evaluation criteria in Section V.1.c. of this NOFO. It will also be reviewed to determine if all costs are reasonable, allocable, and allowable under 2 C.F.R. Part 200 Subpart E, Cost Principles. Information on cost allowability is available in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E), which apply to awards in this program. **If the applicant is successful, additional MEP Single-Year Budget Workbooks must be submitted for future years.**

Information needed for each budget category is as follows:

a) Personnel- At a minimum, the budget justification for all personnel should include the following: job title, commitment of effort on the proposed project in terms of average number of hours per week or percentage of time, salary rate, total personnel charges for each identified position on the proposed project, description of the role of the individual on the proposed project and the work to be performed.

b) Fringe Benefits– Fringe benefits for each position should be identified separately from salaries and wages and based on rates determined by organizational policy. The items included in the fringe benefit rate (e.g., health insurance, FICA, etc.) should not be charged under another cost category.

c) Travel- For all travel costs, the budget justification for travel should include the following: destination; names or number of people traveling; dates and/or duration; mode of transportation, lodging and subsistence rates; and description of how the travel is directly related to the proposed project. For

travel that is yet to be determined, please provide best estimates based on prior experience. If a destination is not known, an approximate amount may be used with the assumptions given for the location of the meeting.

d) Equipment- Equipment is defined as an item of property that has an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more (unless the organization has established lower levels) and an expected service life of more than one year. The budget justification should list each piece of equipment, the cost, and a description of how it will be used and why it is necessary to the successful completion of the proposed project. Please note that any general use equipment (computers, etc.) charged directly to the award should be allocated to the award according to expected usage on the project.

e) Supplies– Supplies are defined as all tangible personal property other than that described as equipment. Provide a list of each supply, and the breakdown of the total costs by quantity or unit of cost. Include the necessity of the cost for the completion of the proposed project.

f) Contractual (i.e., Contracts) – Each contract should be treated as a separate item. Identify the cost and describe the services to be provided and the necessity contract to the successful performance of the proposed project. Contracts are for obtaining goods and services for the Non-Federal Entity's own use and creates a procurement relationship with the contractor.

g) Construction– Not an allowable cost under this NOFO.

h) Other Direct Costs– For costs that do not easily fit into the other cost categories, please list the cost, and the breakdown of the total costs by quantity or unit of cost. Include the necessity of the cost for the completion of the proposed project. Only allowable costs can be charged to the award. Applicants should identify any subawards costs in this category and provide the necessity of the subaward to the successful performance of the proposed project.

i) Indirect Costs- Commonly referred to as Facilities & Administrative Costs, Indirect Costs are defined as costs incurred by the applicant organization that cannot otherwise be directly assigned or attributed to a specific project. The justification should include a cost calculation that reflects the applicable indirect cost rate. For more details, see Section IV.2.a.(9) of this NOFO.

(9) 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 Section B.06 of the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, dated November 12, 2020.

Alternatively, in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.414(f), applicants that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) indirect cost rate, except for those non-Federal entities described in appendix VII, paragraph D.1.b. of 2 C.F.R. Part 200, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC). 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.

(10) Letters of Commitment: (Do not count toward 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 letters of support.

a) Non-profit applicants: A resolution from the fiduciary board authorizing submission of the MEP Center application to NIST 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.

(11) **Current and Pending Support Form**. Any application that includes investigators, researchers, and key personnel must identify all sources

of current and potential funding, including this proposal. Any current project support (e.g., Federal, state, local, public or private foundations, etc.) must be listed on this form. The proposed project and all other projects or activities requiring a portion of time of the Principal Investigator (PI), co-PI,

and key personnel must be included, even if no salary support is received. The total award amount for the entire award period covered, including indirect costs, must be shown as well as the number of person-months per year to be devoted to the project, regardless of the source of support. Similar information must be provided for all proposals already submitted or that are being submitted concurrently to other potential funders.

Applicants must complete the Current and Pending Support Form, using multiple forms as necessary to account for all activity for each individual identified in the PI, co-PI and key personnel roles. A separate form should be used for each identified individual.

Applicants must download the Current and Pending Support Form from the NIST website at https://www.nist.gov/oaam/grants-management-division/current-and-pending-support and reference the guidance provided as it contains information to assist with accurately completing the form.

b. Attachment of Required Documents

Items IV.2.a.(1), IV.2.a.(2) and IV.2.a.(4) above are part of the standard application package in Grants.gov and can be completed through the download application process.

Items IV.2.a.(3) and Items IV.2.a.(5) through IV.2.a.(11) should be attached to field 15 of the SF-424 form by clicking on “Add Attachment”.

Following these directions will create zip files which permit 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 indicates only that an application was transferred to a system. It does not provide details concerning whether all attachments (or how many attachments) transferred successfully. Applicants will receive a series of e-mail messages over a period of up to two business days before learning whether a Federal agency’s electronic system has received its application. Applicants are strongly advised to use the “Download Submitted Forms and Applications” option at grants.gov to check that the application’s required attachments were contained in their submission.

"Download Submitted Forms and Applications" can be found at: https://www.grants.gov/help/html/help/Applicants/CheckApplicationStatus/DownloadSubmittedFormsAndApplications.htm

After submitting the application, check the status of your application here: CHECK APPLICATION STATUS. If any, or all, of the required attachments are absent from the submission, follow the attachment directions found above, resubmit the application, and check again for the presence of the required attachments.

If the directions found at https://www.grants.gov/help/html/help/index.htm#t=GetStarted%2FGetStarted.htm are not effective, please contact the Grants.gov Help Desk immediately. If calling from within the United States or from a U.S. territory, please call 800-518-4726. If calling from a place outside the United States or a U.S. territory, please call 606-545-5035. E-mails should be addressed to support@grants.gov. 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.

Applicants can track their submission in the Grants.gov system by following the procedures at the Grants.gov site (http://go.usa.gov/cjamz). It can take up to two business days for an application to fully move through the Grants.gov system to NIST.

NIST uses the Tracking Numbers assigned by Grants.gov and does not issue Agency Tracking Numbers.

c. Application Format

(1) Paper, Email, and Facsimile (fax) Submissions. Will not be accepted.

(2) Figures, Graphs, Images, and Pictures. Should be of a size that is easily readable or viewable and may be displayed in landscape orientation. Any figures, graphs, images, or pictures will count toward the page limits for the Project Narrative.

(3) Font. Easy to read font (10-point minimum). Smaller type may be used in figures and tables, but must be clearly legible.

(4) Page Limit. The Technical Proposal is limited to twenty-five (25) pages, noting the limit of two (2) pages for the Executive Summary. Resumes are not included in the page count of the Technical Proposal. However, if

resumes are included, resumes must be a maximum of two (2) pages each.

(5) Page Limit Exclusions:

SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance;
SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs for year 1-4;
SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs for year 5;
CD-511, Certification Regarding Lobbying;
SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (if applicable);
Resumes;
Budget Narrative and Justification;
Indirect Cost Rate Agreement;
Letters of Commitment; and
Current and Pending Support Form.

(6) Page Layout. The Proposal must be in portrait orientation.

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

(8) Page numbering. Number pages sequentially.

(9) Application language. English. All documents must be in English, including but not limited to the initial application, any additional documents submitted in response to a NIST request, all reports, and any correspondence with NIST.

(10) Typed document. All applications, including forms, must be typed; handwritten forms will not be accepted.

d. 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.

e. Pre-Applications. Pre-applications will not be accepted under this NOFO.

3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM). Pursuant to 2 C.F.R. Part 25, applicants and recipients 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 NOFO, 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

Applications must be received at Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, Tuesday, April 26, 2022. NIST will consider the date and time recorded by Grants.gov as the official submission time. Applications received after this deadline will not be reviewed or considered. Paper applications will not be accepted.

Applicants should be aware, and factor in their application submission planning, that the Grants.gov system closes periodically for routine maintenance. Applicants should visit Grants.gov for information on any scheduled closures.

When developing the submission timeline, please keep in mind that: (1) all applicants are required to have current registrations in the electronic System for Award Management (SAM.gov) and Grants.gov; (2) the free annual registration process in the SAM.gov generally takes between three and five business days but can take more than three weeks; and applicants will receive e-mail notifications over a period of up to two business days as the application moves through intermediate systems before the applicant learns via a validation or rejection notification whether NIST has received the application. (See Grants.gov for full information on application and notification through Grants.gov.) 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.

5. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by State and local governments are subject to Executive Order (E.O.) 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs," pursuant to which each State designates an entity to coordinate, and review proposed federal financial assistance and direct federal development. All other applicants should consult the Intergovernmental Review State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to determine whether the application is subject to State review pursuant to E.O. 12372. The current SPOC List may be found here: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf

6. **Funding Restrictions**
   Construction activities are not an allowable cost under this program. In addition, a recipient or a subrecipient may not charge profits, fees, or other increments above cost to an award issued pursuant to this NOFO. Pre-award costs under this NOFO are subject to the prior written approval of the NIST Grant Officer.

7. **Other Submission Requirements**

   a. **Applications must be submitted at** Grants.gov. **Paper applications will not be accepted.**

      (1) Applicants should carefully follow specific Grants.gov instructions to ensure that all 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 2022-NIST-MEP-01 announcement, contact the Grants.gov Help Desk at 800-518-4726.

   b. **Amendments.** Any amendments to this NOFO will be announced through Grants.gov. Applicants may sign up on Grants.gov to receive amendments by e-mail or may request copies by e-mail from mepnofo@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 and to the extent they are inconsistent with will supersede those provided in the MEP regulations found at 15 C.F.R. Part 290, specifically 15 C.F.R. §§ 290.6 and 290.7.

The evaluation criteria that will be used to review proposals and their assigned weights, with a maximum score of 100, are as follows:

a. **Project Narrative. (40 points)** Reviewers will evaluate the extent to which the applicant's 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 IV.2.a.6 of this NOFO.

Reviewers will consider the following topics when evaluating the Project Narrative:

i. Center Strategy (20 points)

Reviewers will assess the applicant's strategy proposed for the Center to deliver services that meet manufacturers' needs, generate client inputs (e.g., cost savings, increased sales), and support a strong manufacturing ecosystem. Reviewers will assess the quality with which the applicant:

- incorporates the market analysis described in the criterion set forth in Section 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;
- supports achievements of the MEP mission and objectives while also satisfying the interests of other stakeholders, investors, and partners;
- will identify, reach, and provide proposed services to key market segments and individual manufacturers described above;
- will work with a manufacturer's leadership in strategic discussions related to new technologies, new products and new markets;
- leverages their experience in working with small and medium-sized manufacturers as a basis for future programmatic success; and
- 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.

ii. Market Understanding (10 points)

Reviewers will assess the strategy proposed for the Center to define the target market, understand the needs of manufacturers (especially Small and 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 strategy including:

- segmentation of company size, geography, and industry priorities including some consideration of rural, start-up *(*a manufacturing establishment that has been in operation for five or fewer years) and/or 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.

iii. Performance Measurement and Management (10 points)

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 oversightfor meeting program and service delivery objectives.

b. Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel, Organizational Structure and Management; and Oversight Board or Advisory Committee (30 points; Sub-criteria i. and ii. will be weighted equally)

Reviewers will assess the ability of the key personnel, the applicant's management structure and Oversight Board or Advisory Committee 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, Organizational Structure and Management

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the:

- proposed key personnel have the appropriate experience and education in manufacturing, outreach, program management and partnership development to support achievements of the MEP mission and objectives;
- proposed management structure and organizational roles are aligned to plan, direct, monitor, organize and control the monetary resources of the proposed Center to achieve its business objectives;
- proposed organizational structure 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. Oversight Board or Advisory Committee Reviewers will assess the extent to which the:

- Oversight Board or Advisory Committee and its operations are complete, appropriate, and will meet the program's objectives at the time ofaward, or, if such an Oversight Board or Advisory Committee does not exist at the time of application or is not expected to meet these requirements at the time of award, the extent to which the proposed plan for developing and implementing such an Oversight Board or Advisory Committee within 90 days of award start date is feasible; and
- Oversight Board or Advisory Committee is engaged with overseeing and guiding the Center and supports its own development through a schedule of regular meetings, and processes ensuring Oversight Board or Advisory Committee involvement in strategic planning, recruitment, selection and retention of board members, board assessment practices and board development initiatives.

c. Budget, Narrative, and Justification. (30 points; Sub-criteria i. and ii. will be weighted equally). Reviewers will assess the suitability and focus of the applicant's five-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-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-year project plan;
- a reasonable ramp-up or scale-up scope and budget 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. 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 commitment 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. Part 200, Subpart E;
- applicant's underlying accounting system is established or will be established to meet applicable Federal costs principles set forth in 2 C.F.R. Part 200, Subpart E; and
- the overall proposed 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. Selection Factors

The Selection Factors for this competition are:

(1) The availability of federal funds;
(2) The type and percentage of funding and in-kind commitment from other sources such as 3rd party in-kind;
(3) Relevance of the proposed project to MEP program goals and policy objectives;
(4) Reviewers' evaluations and technical comments;
(5) The geographical diversity and extent of the service area; and
(6) Whether the application complements or supports other Administration priorities or projects supported by DoC or other federal agencies such as, but not limited to, Manufacturing USA;
(7) Past performance on all federal awards.

3. 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, or non-Federal personnel who have entered into conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements covering such information, when applicable.

a. Initial Administrative Review of Applications.
Applications received by the deadline will be reviewed to determine eligibility, completeness, and responsiveness to this NOFO and to the scope of the stated program objectives. Applications determined to be ineligible, incomplete, and/or nonresponsive 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, the absence of which may easily be rectified during the review process.

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 process below:

(1) Merit Review. At least three (3) independent, objective reviewers, who may be Federal employees or non-Federal personnel, who are familiar with MEP and have appropriate professional and technical expertise relating to the topics covered in this NOFO, will form a merit review team to evaluate and score each eligible, complete, and responsive application. Merit reviewers must use the evaluation criteria identified in Section V.1. of this NOFO to evaluate applications. While every application will have a merit review team with at least three (3) reviewers, applications may have more than three (3) reviewers if specialized expertise is needed to evaluate an application. During the review process, the reviewers may discuss the applications with each other, but scores will be determined on an individual basis, not a consensus.

Applications that are numerically scored an average of 70.00 or higher on a scale of 0-100 points will be adjectivally categorized as “fundable” and identified as finalists. Applications that are numerically scored an average below 70.00 on a scale of 0-100 points will be adjectivally categorized as “unfundable” and will not be further considered for funding. Applicants identified as finalists will be invited to participate with reviewers in a telephone or virtual conference or

invited to participate in a site visit that will be conducted by the same reviewers at the applicant's location. If there are two or more finalists, telephone or virtual conference calls, or site visits will be conducted for each finalist. Upon completion of either a telephone or virtual conference call or site visit, reviewers will be given the opportunity to revise their assigned numeric scores based on the evaluation criteria outlined in Section V.1. of this NOFO as a result of information obtained during either conference call or site visit. Any scoring revisions will be made by reviewers on an individual basis.

(2) Ranking. Upon receipt of the technical reviewers' final scores, the Merit Review Team Chair will prepare a final ranking recommendation to provide to the Selecting Official. The ranking ordering of the applications will be based solely on merit reviewers' scores and technical evaluations.

(3) Selection. The Selecting Official, who is the NIST MEP Director or designee, will make final award recommendations to the NIST Grants Officer. The Selecting Official shall generally select and recommend the most meritorious application[s] for an award based upon the adjectival ratings and one or more of the Selection Factors. The Selecting Official retains the discretion to select and recommend an application out of rank order based on the Selection Factors.

NIST reserves the right to negotiate the budget costs with any applicant selected to receive an award, which may include requesting that the applicant removes certain costs. Additionally, NIST may request that successful applicants 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, which may also include the review of publicly available information including but not limited to websites and social media channels. NIST may select some, all, or none of the applications, or part(s) of any application. The final approval of a selected application and issuance of an award 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, the NIST Grants Management Division (GMD) performs pre-award risk assessments in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.206, which may include a review of the financial stability of an applicant, the quality of the applicant's

management systems, the history of performance, and/or the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities.

In addition, prior to making an award where the total Federal share is expected to exceed the simplified acquisition threshold (currently $250,000), NIST GMD will review and consider the publicly available information about that applicant in the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS). An applicant may, at its discretion, review and comment on information about itself previously entered into FAPIIS by a Federal awarding agency. As part of its review of risk posed by applicants, NIST GMD will consider any comments made by the applicant in FAPIIS in making its determination about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards. Upon completion of the pre-award risk assessment, the Grants Officer will make a responsibility determination concerning whether the applicant is qualified to receive the subject award and, if so, whether appropriate specific award conditions that correspond to the degree of risk posed by the applicant should be applied to an award.

4. Anticipated Announcement and Award Date

Review of applications, selection of successful applicants, and award processing is expected to be completed by September 2022. The earliest start date for awards under this NOFO is expected to be January 2023.

5. Additional Information

a. Safety. Safety is a top priority at NIST. Employees and affiliates of award recipients who conduct project work at NIST will be expected to be safety-conscious, to attend NIST safety training, and to comply with all NIST safety policies and procedures, and with all applicable terms of their guest research agreement.

b. Notification to Unsuccessful Applicants. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by e-mail and will have the opportunity to receive a debriefing after the opportunity is officially closed. Applicants must request within 10 business days of the email notification to receive a debrief from the program office. The program office will then work with the unsuccessful applicant in arranging a date and time of the debrief.

c. Retention of Unsuccessful Applications. Unsuccessful applications will be retained in accordance with the General Record Schedule 1.2/021.

VI. Federal Award Administration Information

1. **Federal Award Notices.** Successful applicants will receive an award package from the NIST Grants Officer.

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 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, which apply to awards in this program. Refer to http://go.usa.gov/SBYh and http://go.usa.gov/SBg4.

   b. **Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions.** The Department of Commerce will apply to each award in this program, the Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions in effect on the date of award, including C.03 related to Intellectual Property Rights, which will apply in lieu of 15 C.F.R. § 290.9. The current version, dated November 12, 2020, is accessible at Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. Refer to Section VII. of this NOFO, Federal Awarding Agency Contacts, Grant Rules and Regulations, if you need more information.

   c. **Pre-Award Notification Requirements.** The Department of Commerce will apply the Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements dated December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390), accessible at http://go.usa.gov/hKkR. Refer to Section VII. of this NOFO, Federal Awarding Agency Contacts, Grant Rules and Regulations, for more information.

   d. **Funding Availability and Limitation of Liability.** Funding for the program listed in this NOFO is contingent upon the availability of appropriations. NIST or the Department of Commerce will not be responsible for application preparation costs, including but not limited to if this program fails to receive funding or is cancelled because of agency priorities. Publication of this NOFO does not oblige NIST or the Department of Commerce to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

      NIST issues this notice subject to the appropriations made available under the current continuing resolution funding the Department of Commerce: Division A of the Further Extending Government Funding Act, Public Law 117-70, December 3, 2021. NIST anticipates making awards for the program listed in this notice provided that funding for Fiscal Year 2022 is

continued beyond February 18, 2022, the expiration of the current continuing resolution.

e. **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 NIST MEP Operating Outcome 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, as well subrecipient performance monitoring plans. A copy of the current NIST MEP Operating Plan Guidelines is available at: https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022

f. **Collaborations with NIST Employees.** If an applicant proposes collaboration with NIST, the statement of work should include a statement of this intention, a description of the collaboration, and prominently identify the NIST employee(s) involved, if known. Any collaboration by a NIST employee must be approved by appropriate NIST management and is at the sole discretion of NIST. Prior to beginning the merit review process, NIST will verify the approval of the proposed collaboration. Any unapproved collaboration will be stricken from the application prior to the merit review. Any collaboration with an identified NIST employee that is approved by appropriate NIST management will not make an application more or less favorable in the competitive process.

g. **Use of Federal Government-Owned Intellectual Property.** If the applicant anticipates using any Federal Government-owned intellectual property, in the custody of NIST or another Federal agency, to carry out the work proposed, the applicant should clearly identify such intellectual property in the proposal. This information will be used to ensure that no Federal employee involved in the development of the intellectual property will participate in the review process for that competition. In addition, if the applicant intends to use the Federal Government-owned intellectual property, the applicant must comply with all statutes and regulations governing the licensing of Federal government patents and inventions, described in 35 U.S.C. §§ 200-212, 37 C.F.R. Part 401, 2 C.F.R. § 200.315, and in Section C.03 of the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, dated November 12, 2020. Questions about these requirements may be directed to the Chief Counsel for NIST, (301) 975-2803, nistcounsel@nist.gov.

   Any use of Federal Government-owned intellectual property by a recipient of an award under this announcement is at the sole discretion of the Federal Government and will need to be negotiated on a case-by-case

basis by the recipient and the Federal agency having custody of the intellectual property if a project is deemed meritorious. The applicant should indicate within the statement of work whether it already has a license to use such intellectual property or whether it intends to seek a license from the applicable Federal agency.

If any inventions made in whole or in part by a NIST employee arise in the course of an award made pursuant to this NOFO, the United States Government may retain its ownership rights in any such invention. Licensing or other disposition of the Federal Government's rights in such inventions will be determined solely by the Federal Government, through NIST as custodian of such inventions, and include the possibility of the Federal Government putting the intellectual property into the public domain.

3. Reporting

a. Reporting Requirements. The following reporting requirements described in Sections A.01, Reporting Requirements, of the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions dated November 12, 2020, apply to awards in this program:

(1) Financial Reports. Each award recipient will be required to submit an SF-425, Federal Financial Report 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 Specific Award Condition. These reports will be submitted in the MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS). Reports will be due within 30 days after the end of the reporting period. A final financial report is due within 90 days after the end of the project period.

(2) Performance (Technical) Reports. Each award recipient will 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 Specific Award Condition. Reports will be due in MEIS within 30 days after the end of the reporting period. A final technical progress report is due within 90 days after the end of the project period.

(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 through the MEP Client Impact Survey (OMB Control Number 0693-0021).

(4) Patent and Property Reports. From time to time, and in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Requirements and other terms and conditions governing the award, the recipient may need to submit property and patent reports.

(5) Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters. In accordance with Section 872 of Public Law 110-417 (as amended; see 41 U.S.C. 2313), if the total value of a recipient's currently active grants, cooperative agreements, and procurement contracts from all Federal awarding agencies exceeds $10,000,000 for any period of time during the period of performance of an award made under this NOFO, then the recipient shall be subject to the requirements specified in Appendix XII to 2 C.F.R. Part 200, http://go.usa.gov/cTBwC, for maintaining the currency of information reported to SAM that is made available in FAPIIS about certain civil, criminal, or administrative proceedings involving the recipient.

b. Audit Requirements. The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, Section D.01, and 2 C.F.R. Part 200 Subpart F, adopted by the Department of Commerce through 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, require any non-Federal entity (i.e., including non-profit institutions of higher education and non-profit organizations) that expends Federal awards of $750,000 or more in the recipient's fiscal year to conduct a single or program specific audit in accordance with the requirements set out in the Subpart. Additionally, unless otherwise specified in the terms and conditions of the award, entities that are not subject to Subpart F of 2 C.F.R. Part 200 (e.g., for-profit commercial entities) that expend $750,000 or more in DOC funds during their fiscal year must submit to the Grants Officer either: (i) a financial related audit of each DOC award or subaward in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards; or (ii) a project specific audit for each award or subaward in accordance with the requirements contained in 2 C.F.R. § 200.507. Applicants are reminded that NIST, the Department of Commerce 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 (Public Law 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. Also see the Federal Register notice published September 14, 2010, at 75 FR 55663 available here http://go.usa.gov/hKnQ.

d. MEP Center Performance Assessments. Renewal funding for MEP Centers is contingent, in part, upon successful annual reviews, and panel and Secretarial evaluations in accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g) and 15 C.F.R. § 290.8. Below is a summary of each of these reviews:

(1) Annual Reviews. Within the 12-month operating year and in operating years where a panel or Secretarial evaluation is not conducted, NIST MEP will conduct an annual review. This review will focus on the Center's strategic alignment to NIST MEP's overall program objectives, the Center's activities, progress and performance in implementing the NIST MEP award, lessons learned, monitoring of subrecipients, resource expenditures, activities planned for the next year, and any proposed changes to the project plan or budget. The Non-Federal Entity will be provided guidelines on the format for the review approximately 30 days prior to the Program Review. The results of the annual review will be communicated to the Non-Federal Entity which will have 30 days to provide comments on the draft report. Following receipt and consideration of the comments from the Non-Federal Entity, NIST will notify the Non-Federal Entity in writing of the final recommendations stemming from the annual review. To the extent the annual evaluation process described in this NOFO is inconsistent with 15 C.F.R. § 290.8, the process described in the NOFO will control.

(2) Panel Evaluations. NIST MEP will conduct a panel evaluation during the third year of each Center's operation, in accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g)(1)(A). The evaluation will be conducted by a panel of private experts, none of whom are connected with the Center being evaluated by the panel, and Federal officials. An official of NIST shall be appointed as the panel's chairperson. The Center will be evaluated in accordance with the performance measures described in 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g)(3). Following each evaluation, a draft report will be provided to the Center, noting the panel's observations, deficiencies (if any), recommendations for improvement and commendations on the Center's performance. Centers will have 30 days to provide comments on the draft report. Following receipt and consideration of the comments from the Non-Federal Entity, NIST will notify the Non-Federal Entity in writing of the final recommendations stemming from the panel evaluation. Upon receipt of the final recommendations from NIST, Centers shall, as appropriate,

incorporate such recommendations into the Required Plans and submit revised documents to NIST for prior approval.

(3) Secretarial Evaluations. In the fifth year of a Center's operation, the Secretary shall conduct a review of the Center. The Center will be evaluated in accordance with the performance measures described in 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g)(3). The Secretarial evaluations will be conducted by the MEP Director and Deputy Director. Following each evaluation, a draft report will be provided to the Center, noting the Secretary's observations, deficiencies (if any), recommendations for improvement and commendations on the Center's performance. Centers will have 30 days to provide comments on the draft report. Following receipt and consideration of the comments from the Non-Federal Entity, NIST will notify the Non-Federal Entity in writing of the final recommendations stemming from the Secretarial evaluation. Upon receipt of the final recommendations from NIST, Centers shall, as appropriate, incorporate such recommendations into the Required Plans and submit revised documents to NIST for approval.

(4) Evaluation Outcomes. If a Center receives a positive performance evaluation from the panel or Secretarial evaluations, the Secretary may continue to provide financial assistance in accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g)(4). If a Center receives other than a positive performance evaluation, the Center shall be placed on probation and NIST will follow the provisions set forth in 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g)(5). This includes but is not limited to development and implementation of a performance improvement plan and quarterly reviews of progress against the plan. A reevaluation of the Center shall take place not later than 12 months after the Center has been notified that it is on probation. In the event a Center is unable to remedy any deficiencies or demonstrate significant improvement in performance before the end of the probation period, a competition for a new operator for that Center shall be initiated.

VII. Federal Awarding Agency Contacts

Questions should be directed to the following:

Subject Area	Point of Contact
Programmatic and Technical Questions	Michael Wilson Phone: 301-975-3346 E-mail: michael.wilson@nist.gov with '2022-NIST-MEP-01' in subject line
Technical Assistance with Grants.gov Submissions	grants.gov Phone: 800-518-4726

Subject Area	Point of Contact
	E-mail: support@grants.gov
Grant Rules and Regulations	Gilberto Castillo E-mail: Gilberto.castillo@nist.gov

VIII. Other Information

1. Personal and Business Information

The applicant acknowledges and understands that information and data contained in applications for financial assistance, as well as information and data contained in financial, performance and other reports submitted by applicants, may be used by the Department of Commerce in conducting reviews and evaluations of its financial assistance programs. For this purpose, applicant information and data may be accessed, reviewed and evaluated by Department of Commerce employees, other Federal employees, and also by Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, applicants are expected to support program reviews and evaluations by submitting required financial and performance information and data in an accurate and timely manner, and by cooperating with Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.303(e), applicants are reminded that they must take reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other confidential or sensitive personal or business information created or obtained in connection with a Department of Commerce financial assistance award.

In addition, Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Federal Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. If an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that should be exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. In accordance with 15 C.F.R. § 4.9, the Department of Commerce will protect from disclosure confidential business information contained in financial assistance applications and other documentation provided by applicants to the extent permitted by law.

2. **Public Website**

   NIST MEP has a public website, https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022 that provides information pertaining to this Funding Opportunity[3]. Any amendments to this NOFO will be announced through Grants.gov.

   Applicants must submit all questions pertaining to this funding opportunity in writing to mepnofo@nist.gov with 2022-NIST-MEP-01 in the subject line.

3. **Webinar Information Session**

   NIST MEP will host a webinar information session for applicants that are interested in learning about this funding opportunity. This webinar will provide general information regarding NIST MEP and offer general guidance on preparing proposals and answer questions. There is no cost to attend the webinar. Participation in the webinar is not required and will not be considered in the review and selection process. During the webinar, proprietary technical discussions about specific project ideas will not be permitted. Also, NIST MEP staff will not critique or provide feedback on any specific project idea during the webinar or at any time before submission of a proposal to NIST 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 NIST MEP proposal during this webinar. The exact date and time of this webinar will be posted on the NIST MEP website at https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022. The webinar will be recorded and a link to the recording will be posted on the MEP website. Participation in the webinar is not required in order for an organization to submit an application pursuant to this NOFO.

4. **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**
   Questions from applicants pertaining to 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 mepnofo@nist.gov.

   Questions submitted to NIST MEP may be posted as part of an FAQ document, which will be periodically updated on the NIST MEP website at https://www.nist.gov/mep/mep-center-state-competition-fy-2022.

5. **Informational Forums**

[3] Refer to Section VII. of this NOFO, Federal Awarding Agency Contacts, Programmatic and Technical Questions, if more information is needed.

NIST MEP held a virtual information forum on November 22, 2021 for organizations that are considering applying for the funding opportunity. NIST MEP staff provided general information regarding MEP and offered general guidance on preparing proposals. NIST MEP also provided information about applicant eligibility, cost sharing requirements, evaluation criteria, selection factors and process, and the general characteristics of a competitive MEP proposal during the forums. Details of this forum are posted on the MEP website at https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2021/11/nist-mep-fy-2022-virtual-state-center-competition-information-forum.