

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT**  
**U.S. Department of Commerce**  
**National Institute of Standards and Technology**  
**Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Client Impact Survey**  
**OMB CONTROL NO. 0693-0021**

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.**

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) sponsors the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), a national network of locally-based manufacturing extension centers. Federal sponsorship of the program began in 1989 with awards to three Centers; now the program has grown to fifty-nine (59) Centers throughout the country. The centers work with small manufacturers to help improve their productivity, profitability, and enhance their overall economic competitiveness. Each center is a partnership involving federal, state, local, and client resources. The MEP Centers provide hard-to-find technical assistance and latest business practices within reach of the nation's more than 330,000 small and mid-sized manufacturers.

The MEP Centers focus on providing services that the private sector cannot deliver economically to small manufacturers. Each MEP Center leverages local public and private resources and establishes partnerships to tailor its services to the specific needs of manufacturers in their region. The early analysis of the program indicated that it yielded significant improvements in manufacturing and business performance and that the company benefits were greater than the federal investment.

With the growth in the system of Centers, there came a need for more rigorous and systematic collection of program impact data. To better manage the program, its investment in individual centers, and to monitor and measure program performance, NIST began surveying in MEP Center clients in 1995. The survey collects client-level data on the business impact of the services provided by their local center. This survey collects information on the impact of the Program on manufacturing clients. These results allow the NIST MEP to gauge the impact of the MEP network on America's manufacturers and its economic impact on the national, state, and regional economies. Clients are surveyed after a project is completed and measures the change in the establishment's performance after services are received.

The specific information obtained from clients about the impact of MEP services is essential for NIST officials to monitor and report on program performance and plan program improvements aimed at efficiency and effectiveness. The survey asks clients to report on the business impact of the services provided by their local center. NIST MEP surveys center clients for two primary purposes:

- To collect aggregate information on program performance indicators to report to various stakeholders on program performance including requirements as part of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). The survey provides information about the quantifiable impacts that clients attribute to the services provided by MEP Centers.
- To provide center-specific program performance and impact information for center use. Centers use this information to communicate results to their own stakeholders, at the state and federal level. Center management and NIST MEP use these results to evaluate center performance and effectiveness. The MEP Center Review Criteria and review process place a strong emphasis on a center's ability to demonstrate impacts based on the survey results.

The existing MEP survey effort is a cost-effective method of meeting these needs. A contractor currently conducts the collection of information. The respondents are advised that the survey is voluntary. The survey has been revised and is part of this information collection request.

**2. Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. If the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support information that will be disseminated to the public, then explain how the collection complies with all applicable Information Quality Guidelines.**

Since 1995, NIST MEP has used an independent third party organization to conduct a national survey of Centers' clients. The survey collects data on the business impact of the services provided by their local center. These results allow the NIST MEP to gauge the impact of the MEP network on America's manufacturers and its economic impact on the national, state, and regional economies.

NIST MEP uses the survey data to define, measure and analyze the impact of the MEP program. The data is summarized and national-level analyses of the survey results is produced to provide program specific information to Congress about the program's performance and effectiveness as mandated by GPRA.

NIST MEP also uses this data internally to examine individual MEP Center performance. MEP Centers also use their center-specific results to analyze their effectiveness and make program improvements and communicate to their program stakeholders.

The information on program performance provides information to help maximize the return on public investment by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the national program and its components. The survey data provide evidence of the value added to MEP Center clients as a result of MEP services.

This information collection and dissemination will comply with the NIST CIO Information Quality Guidelines and Standards.

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.**

Clients have two options to complete the survey.

The use Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). This requires scripting how each question is asked to ensure comparability from interviewer to interviewer and from MEP client to MEP client.

The survey is also available via the Internet, which exactly follows the CATI telephone script logic. For the surveys conducted in FY 2006, 80.1 percent were completed via the Internet, 18.4 percent via CATI and 1.5 percent using the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) option. There is also a capability to conduct CATI surveys in Spanish at the client's request.

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.**

There is no duplication involved in this survey since the population is a unique core of clients who have used the services of one of the participating centers. The information collected is not available from existing programs or other sources.

**5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.**

Only the manufacturing firms that received services will be surveyed. There is no sampling; the survey is administered to all clients completing a substantive project. NIST MEP has reduced respondent burden by reducing the number of questions asked and ensuring that clients can respond to the questions easily and at their convenience. The survey has been significantly stream-lined and many questions have been removed. Respondents are given various options (phone and internet) to complete the survey and are mailed the basic questions and other information they need to complete the survey prior to the interview period. Clients are only surveyed once per year.

Centers work with their clients to ensure the survey is not perceived as being burdensome. Most centers inform their clients about the survey process and request their cooperation. All clients are mailed a letter, a list of projects completed, and a summary of the survey questions approximately 10 days before interviews begin. The pre-notification packet introduces the client to the survey purpose, methods available for completion, and the general types of information to be collected.

**6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

The non-collection of data would leave NIST MEP without the information critical to monitor and measure program performance and service impact. NIST would lack the information to help improve the program, monitor performance, and ensure program effectiveness. Such information is unavailable from other sources. NIST MEP would not be able to report on its impact per GPRA requirements, and would be unable to understand and examine the impact of its services on clients, and would not be able to hold centers accountable for performance impacts.

Clients are only contacted 6 months after the completion of a service. Repeat clients are clients are contacted once a year. Thus, less frequently is not possible.

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.**

There are not special circumstances. The survey will be conducted in accordance with the general information collection guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6.

**8. Provide a copy of the PRA Federal Register notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission. Summarize the public comments received in response to that notice and describe the actions taken by the agency in response to those comments. Describe the efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.**

A Federal Register Notice was published on July 2, 2008 requesting comments on the proposed collection (Vol. 73, pg. 37930). No comments were received.

NIST MEP received input in the development of the survey methodology and instrument from its Survey Revisions Committee, consisting of members of Center Directors. In addition, consultants, academics were consulted as changes were being made, to include consultants from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

**9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

The respondents do not receive any gifts or payments in return for their participation.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.**

Respondents are informed that the survey is voluntary. NIST MEP receives the encrypted data directly from the contractor. NIST MEP posts the data sets on the MEP Center's secured intranet. Each Center can download their results directly from the secured site. MEP centers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of their client's survey responses.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.**

There are no sensitive questions on the survey.

**12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.**

It is estimated that 8,000 MEP clients will be contacted per year. The survey is estimated to take no longer than 8 minutes to complete. This results in an annual burden of approximately 1,067 hours.

**13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in #12 above).**

Not Applicable.

**14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.**

The annual cost to the federal government is \$250,000 for the survey contractor. The annual cost includes survey administration, updating the CATI and Web systems, generation and mailing of pre-survey materials, and assembling the final survey data.

**15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB 83-I.**

The number of questions on the survey has been reduced by 50 percent thus lowering individual and overall respondent burden. The annual burden hours have been reduced by 16 hours which is a program change.

Questions 2 thru 6 were eliminated and involved responses to three sub-questions meaning more questions than four as represented. Questions 17 thru 21 were also eliminated. The question on customer satisfaction was reframed.

In addition, more clients are using the Internet option to answer the survey which results in more effective and efficient survey administration, and is an adjustment increase.

**16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.**

The data collected through this survey are tabulated and analyzed in several ways by both NIST MEP and the individual Centers. After each survey period the data is tabulated, analyzed and a summary report is prepared. NIST MEP also generates quarterly performance metrics on program outcomes and impacts that highlights both National results but also individual Center impacts. Survey results are also used in presentations and reports to stakeholders as well as for GPRA purposes.

**17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.**

The OMB control number is displayed on the pre-survey materials sent to respondents as well as the introductory page of the web-based survey.

**18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19 of the OMB 83-I.**

There are no exceptions to the certification.

**B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

Not Applicable.