

**Supporting Statement
U.S. Department of Commerce
National Institute of Standards and Technology
Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Management
Information Reporting
OMB Control No. 0693-0032**

A. JUSTIFICATION

This is an extension of a currently approved information collection.

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

The Department of Commerce (DOC) promotes job creation, economic growth, sustainable development, and improved living standards for all United States citizens. It accomplishes its mission by working in partnership with businesses, universities, communities, and workers by strengthening and safeguarding the nation's economic infrastructure; maintaining competitiveness with cutting-edge science and technology and an unrivaled information base; and effectively manages and stewards our nation's resources and assets to ensure sustainable economic opportunities.

As an agency of DOC, National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) primary mission is to promote U.S. economic growth by working with industry to:

- Develop and apply technology, measurements, and standards
- Maintain and improve the Nation's measurement and standards infrastructure and to foster the development, adoption, and diffusion of new technologies and leading business practices

Offering technical and business assistance to small and medium-sized manufacturers, the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is a major program as part of NIST's primary mission, linking together all 50 states and Puerto Rico through more than 400 affiliated MEP Centers and Field Offices. MEP provides matching funds and technical support to the local MEP Centers. The MEP Centers' primary mission is to strengthen the global competitiveness of U.S.-based manufacturing by providing information, decision support, and implementation assistance to smaller manufacturing firms in adopting new, more advanced manufacturing technologies, techniques, and business best practices. More than 1,200 knowledgeable specialists provide technical and business assistance.

NIST MEP provides funding to the Centers through Cooperative Agreements. To ensure that Cooperative Agreements recipients are effectively disseminating modern technical and

business solutions to small and medium-sized manufacturers in the United States, MEP will collect and analyze information from the MEP Centers. MEP is mandated to collect this information by the regulations governing the operation of the MEP program (15 CFR 290, 291, and 292) and the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA, 5 CFR 1320). The advent of H.R. 1274 – Section 2 (Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program Center Extension) effectively removes the “Sunset Provisions” on the original MEP regulations (15 CFR 290, 291, and 292), and has made MEP a permanent investor in the Centers with the need to collect evaluative and informative data.

2. **Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. If NIST’s Information Quality Guidelines apply, state this and confirm that the collection complies with the Guidelines.**

Quarterly Collection

- Center Information

Center Information provides NIST MEP with general information such as addresses of the Center and Center locations, Center contacts and representatives, phone numbers, fax numbers, mailing addresses and e-mail addresses. This information will be used by MEP as a Center Contact List and as a vehicle to enhance communication among Centers through the use of mailing lists and working groups.

- Client Information File (CIF) and Project Information File (PIF)

The MEP Client Information Files (CIF) and Project Information Files (PIF) contains performance and market research data relative to each activity performed by the respondent Centers during the reporting cycle. The CIF, which contains the DUNS Number and PIF data will be analyzed and benchmarked to provide the organization with performance information needed to support continued investment in Centers, and to identify areas of strength and weakness. The client and project files will also provide MEP with data regarding the markets being served by the Centers, and the system. This type of data will be used to support MEP product and service selection.

- Progress Plan

The Progress Plan includes the Progress Data, Progress Narrative, SF-425 (Federal Financial Form) and Operating Plan.

- The Progress Data is used by NIST MEP to generate standard sets of reports that will be used for Center reviews. Center Reviews will monitor the Centers’ performances compared to the operating plans, goals and objectives. The PDS will collect information on Center operations that include accounting data, number of employees, and activity levels for the quarter.

- Progress Narrative - The Progress Narrative is a narrative-based submission. The PNS will provide NIST MEP qualitative information on the following:
 - Highlights of activities/services provided by the Center but not reported elsewhere (MEP refers to these activities as *non-substantive* activities)
 - New services or service delivery strategies
 - Updates on services/activities that were initiated or completed in conjunction with another organization through formal agreements (MEP refers to these organizations as partners)
 - Discussion of Center's Marketing Plan as part of overall Operating Plan
 - Information and discussion of the Center's market
 - Discussion of Operating Plan (other than the Marketing Plan)

The Progress Narrative informs NIST MEP of progress achieved towards specific items contained in the Center's operating plan, which will be established during Center reviews. The Progress Narrative serves as input into monitoring the Centers progress in implementing their plan.

- Operating Plan - The Center's annual operating plan will provide the NIST MEP Regional Manager with general information about the operations of the Center. This information will be used by Regional Managers in their day-to-day role as the consultant to the Center.
- Partners

MEP uses the Partners to identify successful market distribution models and disseminate this information to the other Centers. The Partners are intended to provide the Center an easy-to-use and readily available mechanism to catalogue organizations.

One of NIST MEP's objectives is to help Centers continually improve the delivery of services to smaller U.S. manufacturers. Partners is a tool that NIST MEP and the Centers study to identify which Centers have the most effective and efficient organizations. The organizational structure of Centers varies by region, by state, and by market and the form of organizational structure may include a formalized agreement or may simply be a working relationship that developed over time. NIST MEP uses this information to inform DOC, NIST, Centers, and Congress about whom is in the MEP program. At NIST, the information is reported to the Director's Office, the Program Office, Legislative Affairs, and through the NIST public website, the general public. MEP informs both NIST and the DOC because they both use the information to evaluate the program. The Partner Entries will also be a general resource for providing information about the Centers.

- Board of Directors

Center Boards are groups comprised of advisory (technical) and oversight (operations) boards. The Center Boards information will include names, positions, board meeting

dates, and meeting minutes. NIST MEP Regional Managers in their day-to-day role as the consultants to the Centers use this information.

- Locations

Locations are physical addresses where Center staff or partner staff are based to deliver service. The Locations are intended to provide NIST MEP with general information such as address information of the Center's locations. Some locations can be partner's service delivery locations. MEP uses this information to communicate our national coverage area with our various stakeholders.

- Staff

The Staff listing provides the Center an easy-to-use and readily available mechanism for reporting on its active workforce. The Staff listing is a compilation of Center personnel that includes headcount and demographic information. The Staff listing assists NIST MEP in tracking Center employee turnover. This information is used to gauge the effects of the Centers operating plans and assist in the reviews and budgeting process.

Anyone devoted to the Center, either through cash or in-kind payments, as delineated in the Center's current Operating Plan, is part of the Center's staff and is reported. Workers, indirectly paid through a subcontract, to work for the Center for a set amount of time per year or for a set amount of money per year, are included as well. The Staff listing is initially submitted when the Centers register for access to the MEP Web site, MEIS. NIST MEP uses the staffing and demographic information contained in the Staff listing for reports to DOC, NIST, NIST MEP, Centers, and Congress and as a general resource for providing information about personnel at the Centers. At NIST, the information is reported to the Director's Office, the Program Office, Legislative Affairs, and through the NIST public website, the general public. MEP informs both NIST and DOC because they both use the information to evaluate the program.

- Contacts

Center Contacts information is collections of Center staff designated by the Center to represent the Center special topic meetings and events. This information will provide NIST MEP with general information such as addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses for Center representatives. This information will be used by MEP to communicate with Centers through the use of mailing lists.

- Success Stories

Success Stories are an effective way to share experiences between NIST MEP, the Centers and the Client Manufacturing Establishments (CMEs). Success Stories communicate the value of MEP's services to stakeholders and potential clients. Centers select stories that best describe the value and quality of their services to CMEs. Success Stories are used as part of presentations for the NIST MEP budgeting process and demonstrate to Congress and the public how the MEP program operates. Additionally, NIST MEP creates promotional materials using Success Stories that best describe the

value and quality of their services to potential clients. Centers must submit one success story per quarter. A second or third success story can be submitted if desired.

- State Funding Partners

The State Funding Partners entries are intended to provide the Center a readily available mechanism for reporting on its relationships with State and Local Government Officials. State Funding Partners are the primary funding decision officials for the program within the state or local government for the Center.

Annual Collection

- Strategic Plan

Annually, each Center submits a copy of its Strategic Plan. The Center also provides the effective dates of the plan. This information will be used by Regional Managers in their day-to-day role as the consultant to the Center.

- Annual Reviews are used by NIST MEP to assess each Center's progress towards the goals and objectives in its annual operating plan. Annual Reviews are mandated by 15 CFR 290, 291, and 292. The review is based on the NIST MEP Annual Review Report Template and NIST MEP Annual Review Process Steps and will be the part of the basis for determining the Centers' future funding. This review may focus on the prior year's activities, progress, lessons learned, resource expenditures, activities planned for the next year, and any proposed changes to the project plan or budget. The results of the Program Review are incorporated into the Operating Plan for the next year of the project and submitted to MEP for approval. Annual Reviews are not conducted during any year in which a panel review is conducted.

- Panel Reviews

The Panel Reviews is conducted during years 3 and 6, and then every 2 years thereafter, i.e., 8, 10, 12, etc. The Panel Review is staffed by a panel of experts, and chaired by an official of NIST MEP. Panel Reviews are necessary to comply with 15 CFR 290. The purpose of the Panel Reviews is to promote:

- Program Accountability

NIST MEP is obliged to determine whether the taxpayers' investment in the Regional Centers are providing efficient and effective transfers of technology to smaller manufacturers in the United States. The results of the Panel Reviews provide NIST MEP with information to determine future funding levels.

- Continuous Improvement

NIST MEP is committed to providing support to the Centers thereby increasing their capacity to serve smaller manufacturers. The reviews with Centers from across the country will provide the MEP program with an archive of lessons learned for the national program. The Center Directors will receive recommendations on how to improve the Center's operations and performance in service delivery.

- Intra-MEP System Learning

The establishment of a network to disseminate manufacturing technology is a founding principle of the MEP program. The Panel Review process will be a mechanism for sharing information within the MEP system. The reviews will provide an exchange of experiences, knowledge and insights of both Centers and panelists. The Centers will benefit from their insights obtained from the review itself as well as the experiences and insights provided by panelists. The panelists will benefit by learning about diverse ways in which Centers operate. The NIST MEP staff members involved in the reviews will benefit from obtaining in-depth knowledge about the operations of a variety of different Centers.

The Center is required to prepare a Center Progress Report (CPR) and will submit the report to the Center's MEP Federal Program Officer and the panel for review. The criteria for assessing the Center's performance are articulated in NIST MEP Center Panel Review Template. NIST MEP prepares standard data formats to assist Centers in preparing the "Center Performance" section of their CPR. Use of standard formats more readily accommodates comparison of a Center's performance to peer norms and averages and allows more in-depth root-cause analysis during the review.

This information collection and dissemination complies 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.

NIST *MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS)* makes maximum use of computer technology to minimize the response burden. Centers submit collections in electronic files (i.e., excel files) and where possible, use the World Wide Web (Web) to submit the required information through the Internet with specially developed software. Security controls ensure that Centers can only access their own data.

Collections made via electronic files facilitate respondents' data entry; ensuring correct and complete data collections while reducing the need for edit follow-ups. One of the key features of the Web-based MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS) system is the thorough editing of all submitted data for completeness, validity, and consistency. This editing is performed as the data are entered. The possibility of invalid data and all questionable or incomplete entries are called to respondents' attention before they are entered into the system.

Collections made via electronic files utilize such user-friendly features as automated tabulation; data entry using custom controls such as pick lists, option menus, and check boxes; and data verification with error messages for easy on-line correction. In addition, a built-in reporting system allows NIST MEP to monitor the progress of the collection as well as to generate special reports on key items.

All Centers have access to the Web. As a result, all reports are currently being submitted via the Web. If a Center is unable to access the Web, it will be provided an appropriate electronic and/or paper version of the data collection instrument.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.

Due to the unique partnership relationship between MEP and the Centers, comparable data are not collected from these local Centers. Consultation with other offices within the Department of Commerce have been used to gather background information about topics and about previously used approaches to increase knowledge base for the local Centers. As a result, the information to be collected through this system will not duplicate any existing collection efforts.

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

Not applicable. The respondents to this information collection are the MEP Centers, which are not small businesses.

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

Removal of the “Sunset Provisions” (H.R.1274), have made NIST MEP a long-term investor in the Regional Centers with a need to establish the *Management Information Reporting* system. The data collected helps NIST MEP monitor and evaluate the Centers' participation in the program and to provide Congress with quantitative information that it requires from government-supported programs. These requirements are clearly stated in the MEP program legislation and the GPRA. Some of these data are collected on a quarterly basis and will enable NIST MEP to identify Centers in need of immediate assistance. Less frequent collection of data would result in the unacceptable situation of making significant policy decisions on the basis of obsolete and potentially misleading information. It might also delay the provision of assistance to the Centers.

If the information is not collected, NIST MEP staff is unable to monitor Center performance and ensure that the MEP program is meeting the goal of “strengthening the global competitiveness of smaller U.S. manufacturers.” Additionally, national stakeholders, including Congress and Federal agencies use the information to make annual funding decisions regarding the MEP national appropriation. These stakeholders need information on which to base their decisions. Information demonstrating compelling evidence of program effectiveness is a critical component of that decision. The NIST MEP reporting and survey systems are designed to collect this information so that it can be made available to stakeholders. Finally, MEP would be unable to fully comply with the GPRA mandate that all Federal agencies evaluate their programs’ outcomes.

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

All data will be collected in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5CFR 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.**

As required by 5CFR 1320.8(d), MEP's notice soliciting comments on the information was published in the Federal Register, Vol. 80, pp. 13522, on March 16, 2015. No comments were received.

A 30-day notice was published in the Federal Register, Vol 80, pp. 28952 on May 20, 2015.

The development of the data collections and *Management Information Reporting* system is the result of extensive collaboration between NIST MEP and the Centers. NIST MEP received input regarding data availability and frequency of the collection from its staff. This group provided their professional opinions and expertise in developing the survey questions and protocol. Consultants continue to meet periodically and communicate electronically in a continuing effort to maximize response rates and ensure high levels of data quality. Potential information collections are discussed/reviewed by the National Advisory Board, which meets three times per year. In addition, Center representatives will be able to comment on the collection process at annual conferences and through meetings with user groups and information technology development specialists. The conference offers the opportunity for attendees to view presentations, receive the procedures in a bound format to take back to the Centers. Center staff has an opportunity to review and discuss the materials among themselves before suggesting changes/revisions to NIST MEP.

9. **Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

No payments or gifts will be provided to respondents.

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

For all collections, the confidentiality of all responses is maintained to the extent permitted by law. To protect the Centers' privacy, only composite data or graphical representations are included in the public reporting of the collection's findings. A statement to this effect is presented to the Centers prior to their submission of information.

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.

Not applicable, the types of questions asked in the survey are not likely to be considered sensitive. Questions focus on institutional or organizational information rather than on individuals.

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

Summary of Hour Burden

Number of Respondents (Centers)	60
Burden per Respondent	160
Total	9,600

Quarterly Reports: $60 \times 4 = 240$ responses $\times 25$ hours = 6,000 hours

Annually Reports: $60 \times 1 \times 60$ hours = 3,600 hours

The information to be collected is what the respondents must develop pursuant to their normal budget and strategy planning. What a Center needs to prepare is minimal beyond what a Center is expected to do in their normal course of operations. Therefore, the costs to respondents is minimal and the only expenses are those required to review this information for consistency with MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS) Procedures to enter this information into the appropriate collection form, and submit it to NIST MEP.

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 Question 12 above).

It is not anticipated that respondents will incur any start-up or capital costs as a result of these collections.

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

The organization already has in place the necessary computing infrastructure, web development and database tools to support this effort, as well as, trained staff whom are

familiar with developing and maintaining web based financial and knowledge sharing systems for MEP.

The total annualized cost to the federal government for developing, maintenance, licensing, and hardware for the MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS) System is \$260,000. That amount should not increase significantly, as a result of this effort. As previously stated, a number of complementary activities already exist within the organization that will support the collection, management, and dissemination of the data from the respondent Centers. Following the initial investment of labor to create the forms and supporting databases to collect and store the information, as well as, develop the supporting documentation and training, the annual costs should be absorbed by the organization through realignment of roles, responsibilities, and priorities.

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.

Not applicable

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

The data is collected indefinitely for internal review purposes and to monitor the Centers, as well as for reporting to Congress. Reports dealing with the characteristics and performance of the Centers include trends, benchmarks, statistical tables and charts generated from the database. Information is presented in the following methods:

- Reports to Congress
- Promotional/marketing brochures
- Center Reports
- Internal Reports
- Presentations to MEP stakeholders
- Center Reviews

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.

Not applicable, the collections will display the expiration date for OMB approval.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

Not applicable.

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

Not applicable.