

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 a revision and 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 almost 300 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 1,300 knowledgeable specialists provide technical and business assistance.

NIST MEP provides funding to the Centers through Cooperative Agreements. To ensure that Cooperative Agreement recipients are effectively disseminating the most current 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.

All information is readily available in MEP’s Enterprise Information System (MEIS). Most information is submitted on a scheduled basis by Centers. In some cases where NIST review is required, the documents are uploaded upon acceptance (ex. Proposal/Statement of Work, Intellectual Property Plan).

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

- **Information**

Center Information provides NIST MEP with general information such as addresses of the Center, phone number, fax number, mailing address and e-mail address, organizational type, Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) number and Center logo. This information will be used by the National Network as the official list of active centers (MEP Quick List).

- **Locations**

Locations are physical addresses where Center staff or partner staff are based to deliver services. Locations are intended to provide NIST MEP with general information such as address, phone number, status of the Center’s locations (Field Offices, Partners as Service Delivery Locations, Center Regional Offices (CROs)). MEP uses this information to communicate our National Network coverage area with 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, and Partners (Sub-recipient Agreements (SRAs), Third Party Contributors (TPC) and Third-party Providers (TPP) and includes address, phone number, email address, authentication information and roles. This information is used to maintain access to MEIS and assign staff to awarded Funding Programs.

- **Contacts**

Center Contacts information is a collection of Center staff designated by the Center to be notified when announcements via email need to be communicated to appropriate personnel within the National Network. Example: Center Director, Reporting Contact and MEP Technology Scouts. The NIST MEP List Server pulls these distribution lists dynamically and utilizes NIST Office 365 to relay messages.

■ **Clients (Client Information File (CIF))**

NIST MEP collects Client information detailing client address, DUNS number, as well as primary and secondary contact information to conduct the NIST MEP Client Survey (OMB Control No. 0693-0021) measuring realized impacts (sales, investment, employment, cost savings, etc.) of services to our clients. Customer satisfaction is also measured using the Net Promoter Score™. Surveys are conducted six months after the completion of the project, unless a project is submitted for a repeat client that is already in the survey cycle. Client information may also be used for other purposes such as data analysis and research related to market understanding, industry information, performance management and the coordination of National Network activities.

■ **Projects and Events (Project Information File (PIF))**

NIST MEP collects Project/Event information describing the services provided including title, description, substance code, hours, value, key and key staff is collected to conduct the NIST MEP Client Survey (OMB Control No. 0693-0021) measuring the realized impacts (sales, investment, employment, cost savings, etc.) of services to our clients. Customer satisfaction is also measured using the Net Promoter Score™. Surveys are conducted six months after the completion of the project, unless a project is submitted for a repeat client that is already in the survey cycle. All projects and events reported to NIST MEP will be surveyed. Project information may also be used for other purposes such as data analysis and research related to market understanding, industry information, performance management and the coordination of National Network activities.

■ **Progress Data**

The Progress Data reporting element is used collect quantifiable data for the award including Center full time equivalents (FTEs) for Management, Technical, Sales, and Other categories. The total number of unique Small to medium-sized Manufacturing Establishments (SMEs) served for the past 12 months is also collected for reporting to stakeholders. The Progress Data is used by NIST MEP to generate standard sets of reports that will be used during Center Annual and Panel Reviews as part of the process to monitor Centers' performance. MEP Management, FPOs, and RMs use this information to monitor Center capacity utilization based on resources.

- **Partners**

The Partner submission provides the Center a readily available mechanism for reporting on its formal and informal relationships with other organizations. This information is used to show that MEP Centers are working with partner organizations to deliver the best possible services and products to its clients through formal and informal agreements. The type of support (deliver services, marketing, referrals, office space, etc.) provided by the Partner is also collected. NIST MEP uses this information to inform DOC, NIST, Centers, and Congress about the external resources that contribute to the success of the MEP program.

- **Board of Directors**

Center Boards are groups of members that provide advisory and/or fiduciary oversight to the Center. As part of the Board submission the Board By-Laws are a required document to be submitted by the Center. Center Boards are required to have an appropriate representation of small/medium-sized manufacturers, higher education staff, and state/local government officials as described in the MEP Terms and Conditions. The Board Member information collected includes name, position, tenure, chairman and small manufacturer status. NIST MEP Management and RMs use this information to communicate with the Center Board members and to ensure the makeup of the board is appropriate to the oversight needs of the Center.

- **State Funding Partners**

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. A State Funding Partner is directly associated with a Partner.

- **Success Stories**

Success Stories are an effective way to share experiences between NIST MEP, the Centers and 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. Additional Success Stories can be submitted if desired.

Semi-Annual Collection

- **Progress Plan (also known as The Technical Report)**

The Progress Plan/Technical Report is required per the cooperative agreement and includes Progress Narratives in response to the Operating Outcome Statement, upload of the SF-425 (Federal Financial Form), upload of any additional documentation the Center deems necessary, assertion that submission is accurate, assertion that the multi-year budget has been changed if needed, and the Proposal/SOWs and Operating Outcome Statement is current. In support of this process, the current version of the Operating Outcome Statement, previous Progress Plan submission, history of Proposal/Statement of Work and calculation of Client and Engagement progress towards goals are accessible by the Center.

- **Progress Narrative** -The Progress Narrative is a narrative-based submission of progress towards the approved Operating Outcome Statement. The Progress Narrative section of the Progress Plan informs NIST MEP of progress achieved towards specific plans established during Cooperative Agreement Award and Center Annual and Panel Reviews. The Progress Narrative serves as input into monitoring the Centers progress in implementing approved plans. The Progress Narrative will provide NIST MEP qualitative information on the following:
 - Center client activity levels by type of company, with a focus on very small, rural, start-up, and transformational clients, including quantified goals
 - Services delivered to promote Top and Bottom-line growth including quantified goals
 - Engagements in Top-Line and Bottom-Line Growth
 - Making new technologies available
 - Other center initiatives
 - Board development
 - Identification of performance levels
 - **SF-425** – Ability for the Center to upload the official financial form that details the cumulative budget across the award including detailed revenue and expenses
 - **Related Documents** – Opportunity for the Center to provide other documents that details the progress of the Center in comparison to agreed upon plans and goals.
- **Budget Actuals**

Budget Actuals can be entered at any time, but must be entered at least semi-annually to provide NIST MEP detailed information as to the Revenue and Expenses generated by the Center in performance of the cooperative agreement. MEP Management, FPOs, and RMs use this information to monitor Center use of funds and to calculate various indicators that detail Center capacity utilization.

Annual Collection

- **Annual Review**
Used by NIST MEP to assess each Center’s progress towards the goals and objectives set forth in its Operating Outcome Statement. Annual Reviews are mandated by 15 CFR 290,

291, and 292. The review is based on the NIST MEP Annual Review Report Template will be part of the basis for determining the Centers' future funding. This review focuses on the prior year's activities, progress, lessons learned, resource expenditures, activities planned for the next year, and any proposed changes to the Proposal/SOWs, Operating Outcome Statement, multi-year budget and IP Plan. The results of the Annual Review are incorporated into the appropriate documents and statements for the next year of the project and submitted to MEP for approval as appropriate. Annual Reviews are not conducted during any year in which a Panel Review is conducted.

■ **Panel Review**

The Panel Reviews is conducted during Year 3 of the award. If a Center is approved for a consecutive award, the Panel Review for that award is conducted in Year 8. 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 Performance and Profile Report (CPPR) and will submit the report to the Center's RM, FPO, and 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 their CPPR. Use of standard formats more readily accommodates comparison of a Center's performance to the National Network 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 responses via the World Wide Web (Web) <https://meis.nist.gov> to submit the required information directly into MEIS over the Internet or in electronic files (i.e., Adobe PDF, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel) Security and access controls ensure that Centers can only access publicly available data of other Centers in the National Network as well as their own data that is considered sensitive (Clients, Projects, Impacts).

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 MEIS is the thorough editing of all submitted data for completeness, validity, and consistency. 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.

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), has made NIST MEP a long-term investor in the Centers with a need to establish the *MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS)*. 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. Data are collected on a quarterly, semi-annual, annual basis. Timely data collection, monitoring and analysis 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 based on obsolete and potentially misleading information, potentially delaying 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 system is 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 60 day Federal Register, Vol. 83, No.114, pp. 27543, on June 13, 2018. No comments were received.

A 30-day notice was published in the Federal Register, Vol 83, No. 166, pp.43656 on August 27, 2018.

The development of the data collections and *MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS)* 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 (1 year)

Number of Respondents (Centers)	51	17
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Burden per Respondent (hours)	5,508	1,360
Total	5,508	1,360

Quarterly Reports: 51 x 4 (times per year) = 204 responses x 20 hours = 4,080 hours.

Semi-annual Reports: 51 x 2 (times per year) = 102 responses x 4 hours = 408 hours.

Annual Reporting: 34 Responses x 30 hours = 1,020 hours.

Panel Review: 17 Responses X 80 hours = 1,360 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 Question 12 above).

It is not anticipated that respondents will incur any start-up or capital costs due to 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 familiar with developing and maintaining web based financial and knowledge sharing systems for NIST MEP.

The total annualized cost to the federal government for developing, maintenance, licensing, and hardware for the MEP Enterprise Information System (MEIS) System is \$500,000. That amount should not increase significantly. 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.

- The number of respondents (MEP Centers) have decreased from 61 to 51.
- All 51 Centers will be required to complete the Semi-Annual Review in addition to the Quartely Report.

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

Data collected will be maintained as long as practical and as outlined in the the appropriate Records Schedule: NIST Comprehensive Record Schedule item 9 (N1-167-92-1/9). It is important to retain the data for analysis and program purposes such as internal review practices, monitoring Centers, reporting to Congress, and detailed studies. For instance,

GAO is currently conducting a Congressionally mandated study of the program and they wanted to look at selected data over time. 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.