

Manufacturing Extension Partnership, 100 Bureau Drive, Stop 4800, Building 301, Room C100, Gaithersburg, MD 20899-4800. Plainly mark on the outside of the package that it contains a manufacturing extension center proposal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information regarding this announcement, contact Diane Henderson of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership by calling (301) 975-5020; or by mailing information requests to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, Manufacturing Extension Partnership, 100 Bureau Drive, Stop 4800, Building 301, Room C100, Gaithersburg, MD 20899-4800. Information packets, which include background materials on MEP, existing centers and the necessary application forms, should be requested via a one page fax sent to (301) 963-6556. Please include name, organization, mailing address, telephone number, and fax number on this request. Information is also available on-line at <http://www.mep.nist.gov>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Authority: 15 U.S.C. 278k, as implemented in 15 CFR part 290.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Name and Number

The catalog number for the award of Manufacturing Technology Centers funds in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance is 11.611.

Program Description and Objectives

NIST will provide assistance for the creation and support of manufacturing extension centers. The objective of these centers is to enhance productivity, technological performance, and strengthen the global competitiveness of small- and medium-sized U.S.-based manufacturing firms.

These manufacturing extension centers will become part of the MEP national system of extension service providers. Currently, the MEP national system consists of over 400 centers and field offices located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Information regarding MEP and these centers is provided in the information packet that can be obtained as explained above or on-line at <http://www.mep.nist.gov>.

The objective of the projects funded under this program is to provide manufacturing extension services to small- and medium-sized manufacturers in the United States. These services are provided through the coordinated efforts of a regionally-based manufacturing extension center and

local technology resources. The management and operational structure of the manufacturing extension center is not prescribed, but should be based upon the characteristics of the manufacturers in the region and locally available resources. The center should include plans for integration into the MEP national system and linkages to appropriate national resources.

The focus of the center is to provide those manufacturing extension services required by the small- and medium-sized manufacturers in its service region using the most cost effective sources for those services. It is not the intent of this program that centers perform research and development.

Funding Availability

It is anticipated that approximately \$4 million will be available to support manufacturing extension centers under this announcement. The funding level for individual awards is not prescribed. The funding requested by the applicant should be directly related to the level of activity of the center, which is a function of the number of manufacturers in the designated service region, and to the availability of applicant-provided cash and in-kind contributions to be used as cost share.

Matching Requirements

A cost sharing contribution from the applicant is required. The applicant must provide 66⅔ % or more of the total capital, operating and maintenance costs for the center, as all of these states have had previously existing MEP centers. The applicant's share of the center expenses may include cash and in-kind contributions. However, at least 50% of the applicant's total cost share (cash plus in-kind) must be in cash. The source of the cost share, both cash and in-kind, must be documented in the budget submitted in the proposal.

Funding Instrument

The formal agreement between NIST and a successful applicant will be in the form of a cooperative agreement. Under this agreement, the NIST MEP will have substantial interactions with the applicant in planning and executing this project. This will include the following:

- Assisting in developing required plans.
- Providing access to standard manufacturing extension and related tools.
- Facilitating partnering with appropriate organizations both within and outside of the MEP national system.
- Defining measures for evaluation of performance.

—Direct involvement in helping to understand, define, and resolve problems in the center's operations.

Eligibility Criteria

Manufacturing extension centers must be affiliated with a U.S.-based not-for-profit institution or organization. MEP interprets not-for-profit organizations to include universities and state and local governments. Eligible applicants may be consortia of non-profit institutions. Existing MEP manufacturing extension centers are eligible.

Award Period

The projects awarded under this program will have a budget and performance period of one year. These projects may be renewable on an annual basis subject to the review requirements described in 15 CFR 290.8. Renewal of these projects shall be at the sole discretion of NIST and shall be based upon satisfactory performance, priority of the need for the service, existing legislative authority, and availability of funds.

Evaluation Criteria

All qualified proposals will be evaluated and rated on the basis of the following criteria by an impartial review panel. Each proposal should address all four evaluation criteria, which are assigned equal weighting.

(1) *Identification of Target Firms in Proposed Region.* Does the proposal define an appropriate service region with a large enough population of target firms of small- and medium-sized manufacturers that the applicant understands and can serve, and which is not presently served by an existing center?

(i) *Market Analysis.* Demonstrated understanding of the service region's manufacturing base, including business size, industry types, product mix, and technology requirements.

(ii) *Geographical Location.* Physical size, concentration of industry, and economic significance of the service region's manufacturing base. Geographical diversity of the centers will be a factor in evaluation of proposals; a proposal for a center located near an existing center may be considered only if the proposal is unusually strong and the population of manufacturers and the technology to be addressed justify it.

(2) *Technology Resources.* Does the proposal assure strength in technical personnel and programmatic resources, full-time staff, facilities, equipment, and linkages to external sources of