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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Institute of Standards and Technology

[Docket Number: 180703606-8606-01]

Award Competition for Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Center in the State of Alaska

AGENCY: National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), United States Department of Commerce (DoC).

ACTION: Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

SUMMARY: NIST invites applications from eligible organizations in connection with NIST's funding of an MEP cooperative agreement for the operation of an MEP Center in the State of Alaska in the amount identified in the Funding Availability section of this notice. NIST anticipates awarding one (1) cooperative agreement for the State of Alaska. The objective of this announcement by the MEP Program is to provide manufacturing extension services to primarily small and medium-sized manufacturers within the State of Alaska. The selected organization will become part of the MEP National Network™ of extension service providers, currently located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

DATES: Electronic applications must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Oct 23, 2018. Paper applications will not be accepted. Applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed or considered. The approximate start date for awards under this notice and the corresponding NOFO is expected to be January 1, 2019.

ADDRESSES: Applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov. NIST will not accept applications submitted by mail, facsimile, or by email.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Administrative, budget, cost-sharing, and eligibility questions and other programmatic questions should be directed to Mike Simpson at Tel: (301) 975-6147 or Wiza Lequin at Tel: (301) 975-4395; Email: mepnofo@nist.gov; Fax: (301) 963-6556. Grants Rules and Regulation questions should be addressed to: Leon Sampson, Grants Management Division, National Institute of Standards and Technology, 100 Bureau Drive, Stop 1650, Gaithersburg, MD 20899-1650; Tel: (301) 975-3086; Email: leon.sampson@nist.gov; Fax: (301) 975-6368. For technical assistance with Grants.gov submissions contact Leon Sampson at Tel: (301) 975-3086; Email: grants@nist.gov; Fax: (301) 975-6368. Questions submitted to the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NIST MEP) may be posted as part of an FAQ document, which will be periodically updated on the MEP website at <https://www.nist.gov/mep/manufacturing-extension-partnership-center-alaska>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic access: Applicants are strongly encouraged to read the corresponding NOFO announcement available at www.grants.gov for complete information about this program, including all program requirements and instructions for applying electronically. Paper applications or electronic applications submitted other than through www.grants.gov will not be accepted.

System for Award Management registration required: When developing your submission timeline, please keep in mind that (1) all applicants are required to have a current registration in

the System for Award Management (SAM.gov); (2) the free annual registration process in the electronic System for Award Management (SAM.gov) may take between three and five business days, and may take as long as two weeks; (3) applicants submitting electronic applications are required to have a current registration in Grants.gov; and (4) applicants will receive a series of e-mail messages from Grants.gov over a period of up to two business days before learning whether a Federal agency's electronic system has received its application. Please note that a federal assistance award cannot be issued if the designated recipient's registration in the SAM.gov is not current at the time of the award.

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

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

Webinar Information Session: NIST MEP will hold a webinar information session for organizations that are considering applying to this funding opportunity. This webinar will provide general information regarding MEP and offer general guidance on preparing proposals. NIST MEP staff will be available on the webinar to answer general questions. Also, NIST MEP staff will not critique or provide feedback on any specific project ideas during the webinar or at any time before submission of a proposal to 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 MEP proposal during this webinar. The webinar will be held approximately fifteen (15) to thirty (30)

business days after posting of the corresponding NOFO. The exact date and time of the webinar will be posted on the MEP website at <https://www.nist.gov/mep/manufacturing-extension-partnership-center-alaska>. The webinar will be recorded, and a link to the recording will be posted on the MEP website. In addition, the webinar presentation will be available on the MEP website. Organizations wishing to participate in the webinar must sign up by e-mailing mepnofo@nist.gov. Participation in the webinar is not required in order for an organization to submit an application pursuant to this notice and the corresponding NOFO.

Program Description: NIST invites applications from eligible applicants for a NIST cooperative agreement funding for one (1) MEP center to provide manufacturing extension services to primarily small and medium-sized manufacturers in the State of Alaska.

The Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is based at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The National Program Office (aka NIST MEP), which provides the federal government funding for the MEP National Network, is located in Gaithersburg, MD.

The MEP National Network is a unique public-private partnership that delivers comprehensive, proven solutions to U.S. manufacturers, fueling growth and advancing U.S. manufacturing.

Focused on helping small and medium-sized manufacturers generate business results and thrive in today's technology-driven economy, the MEP National Network comprises the NIST MEP, the 51 MEP Centers located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, and over 1,300

trusted advisors and experts at more than 400 MEP service locations, providing any U.S. manufacturer with access to resources they need to succeed.

The MEP National Network's strength is in its partnerships. Through its 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. The MEP Program serves as a bridge to other organizations and federal research labs that share the mission of enhancing the manufacturing community.

In 2017, the MEP National Network connected with 26,313 manufacturers, leading to \$12.6 billion in sales, \$1.7 billion in cost savings, \$3.5 billion in new client investments, and helping to create and retain more than 100,000 U.S. manufacturing jobs.

The MEP program is not a Federal research and development program. It is not the intent of the program that awardees will perform systematic research.

To learn more about the MEP program, please go to <http://www.nist.gov/mep/>.

Funding Availability: NIST anticipates funding one (1) Center award for the State of Alaska with an initial five-year period of performance in accordance with the multi-year funding policy described in Section II.3. of the corresponding NOFO. Funding for the award listed below is

contingent upon the availability of appropriated funds. The table below lists the state identified for funding as part of the corresponding NOFO and the estimated amount of funding available:

MEP Center Location and Assigned Geographical Service Area (by State)	Anticipated Annual Federal Funding for Each Year of the Award	Total Federal Funding for 5 Year Award Period
Alaska	\$500,000	\$2,500,000

Applicants may propose annual Federal funding amounts that are different from the anticipated annual Federal funding amount set forth in the above table, provided that the total amount of Federal funding being requested by an applicant does not exceed the total amount of Federal funding for the five-year award period as set forth in the above table. For example, if the anticipated annual Federal funding amount for an MEP Center is \$500,000 and the total Federal funding amount for the five-year award period is \$2,500,000, an applicant may propose Federal funding amounts greater, less than, or equal to \$500,000 for any year or years of the award, so long as the total amount of Federal funding being requested by the applicant for the entire five-year award period does not exceed \$2,500,000.

Multi-Year Funding Policy. When an application for a multi-year award is approved, funding will usually be provided for only the first year of the project. Recipients will be required to submit detailed budgets and budget narratives prior to the award of any continued funding. 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 to the mission and priorities of the program, and the availability of Federal funds. Continuation of an award to extend the period of performance and/or to increase or decrease funding is at the sole discretion of NIST.

Potential for Additional 2 Years. Initial awards issued pursuant to the corresponding 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 an additional two (2) year period at the end of the initial award period (*i.e.*, up to a total of seven (7) years). As discussed in Section VI.3.d. of the corresponding NOFO, renewal funding for MEP Centers is contingent, in part, upon successful annual and panel reviews, and Secretarial evaluations in accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(g) and 15 CFR Section 290.8.

Kick-Off Conference

A recipient will be required to attend a kick-off conference, which will be held within 30 days post start date of award, to help ensure that the MEP Center operator has a clear understanding of the program and its components. The kick-off conference will take place at NIST MEP headquarters in Gaithersburg, MD, during which time NIST will: (1) orient MEP Center key personnel to the MEP program; (2) explain program and financial reporting requirements and procedures; (3) identify available resources that can enhance the capabilities of the MEP Center; and (4) negotiate and develop a detailed three-year operating plan with the recipient. NIST MEP anticipates an additional set of site visits at the MEP Center and/or telephonic meetings with the recipient to finalize the three-year operating plan.

The kick-off conference will take up to approximately three days and must be attended by the MEP Center Director, along with up to two additional MEP Center employees. Applicants must include travel and related costs for the kick-off conference as part of the budget for year one (1), and these costs should be reflected in the SF-424A form. (See Section IV.2.a.(2). of the corresponding NOFO). 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 narratives section of the Technical Proposal. (See Section IV.2.a.(6).(e). of the corresponding NOFO). Representatives from key subrecipients and other key strategic partners may attend the kick-off conference with the prior written approval of the Grants Officer. Applicants proposing to have key subrecipients and/or other key strategic partners attend the kick-off conference should clearly indicate that fact as part of the budget narrative for year one of the project.

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 Budget Summary form (see Section IV.2.a.(2). of the corresponding NOFO). These costs must be reflected in the budget summary tables and budget narratives for each of the project's five (5) years, which are submitted in the budget summary tables and budget narratives section of the Technical Proposal. (See Section IV.2.a.(6).(e). of the corresponding NOFO). A budget summary table and narrative template for Year 1 and budget summary table for Years 2-5 is available on the MEP website, https://www.nist.gov/mep/manufacturing-extension-partnership-center-alaska_

Cost Share or Matching Requirement: In accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(e)(2), the minimum non-Federal cost share for MEP Center cooperative agreements is 50 percent of the total approved project budget, which is determined on an annual basis. The MEP statute requires that minimum cost share requirements must be met annually; there can be no carryover of excess cost share from one year to the next.

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 at 2 CFR 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.c.ii. of the corresponding NOFO.

Recipients must meet the minimum non-Federal cost share requirements for each year of the award, with each such year being distinct and unique for cost-share purposes. Cost-share cannot be “carried” forward from one year to the next under this program. For purposes of the MEP program, “program income” (as defined in 2 CFR 200.80, as applicable) generated by an MEP Center may be used by a recipient towards the required non-Federal cost share under an MEP award.

As with the Federal share, any proposed costs included as non-Federal cost sharing must be an allowable/eligible cost under this program and under the Federal cost principles set forth in 2 CFR part 200, Subpart E. Non-Federal cost sharing incorporated into the budget of an approved MEP cooperative agreement is subject to audit in the same general manner as Federal award funds. See 2 CFR part 200, Subpart F.

As set forth in Section IV.2.a.(7) of the corresponding NOFO, 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. 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.

Eligibility: The eligibility requirements set forth in 15 U.S.C. § 278k(a)(5) and in Section III.1. of the corresponding NOFO will be used in lieu of and to the extent they are inconsistent with

will supersede the eligibility requirements provided in the MEP regulations found at 15 CFR part 290, specifically 15 CFR § 290.5(a)(1). Each applicant for and recipient of an MEP award must be a United States-based nonprofit institution, or consortium thereof, an institution of higher education, or a State, United States territory, local, or tribal government. Existing MEP awardees and new applicants that meet the eligibility criteria set forth in Section III.1. of the corresponding NOFO may apply. An eligible organization may work individually or may include proposed subawards to eligible organizations or proposed contracts with any other organization as part of the applicant's proposal, effectively forming a team. However, as discussed in Section I.4. of the corresponding 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 and Governance structure or plan for establishing a board structure within 90 calendar days from the award start date (Refer to Section I.3. of the corresponding NOFO). In accordance with 15 U.S.C. § 278k(e)(2), the minimum non-Federal cost share for MEP Center cooperative agreements is 50 percent of the total approved project budget, which is determined on an annual basis. The MEP statute requires that minimum cost share requirements must be met annually; there can be no carryover of excess cost share from one year to the next. *See* Section III.2. of the corresponding NOFO for more information on the non-Federal cost sharing requirements under MEP awards.

Application Requirements: Applications must be submitted in accordance with the requirements set forth in Section IV. of the corresponding NOFO announcement, which are in lieu of and to the extent they are inconsistent with will supersede any application requirements set forth in 15 CFR 290.5. *See specifically* Sections IV.2.a.(1)., IV.2.a.(2)., and IV.2.a.(7). in the Full Announcement Text of the corresponding NOFO.

Application/Review Information: The evaluation criteria, selection factors, and the review and selection process provided in this section will be used for this competition and are consistent with the evaluation requirements set forth in 15 U.S.C. § 278k(f)(5)(B). To the extent that the evaluation criteria, selection factors or the review and selection process contained in the corresponding NOFO are inconsistent with the MEP regulations found at 15 CFR part 290, specifically 15 CFR 290.6 and 290.7, the evaluation criteria, selection factors and the review and selection process contained in the corresponding NOFO will control.

Evaluation Criteria: The evaluation criteria that will be used in evaluating applications and assigned weights, with a maximum score of 100, are listed below.

a. **Project Narrative. (40 points; Sub-criteria i through iv will be weighted equally)**

NIST/MEP 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

II.2. of the corresponding NOFO. Reviewers will consider the following topics when evaluating the Project Narrative:

- i. Center Strategy.** Reviewers will assess the applicant's strategy proposed for the Center to deliver services that meet manufacturers' needs, generate client impacts (e.g., cost savings, increased sales, etc.), 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 paragraph a.ii.(1) below and Section V.1.a.ii.(1). of the corresponding NOFO 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; and
 - supports achievements of the MEP mission and objectives while also satisfying the interests of other stakeholders, investors, and partners.

ii. Market Understanding. 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 years or less) 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 paragraph a.ii.(1) above and Section V.1.a.ii.(1) of the corresponding NOFO. Of particular interest, is the applicant's ability to:

- leverage new manufacturing technologies, techniques and processes usable by small and medium-sized manufacturers through technology diffusion and transfer; and,
- support a stronger training and education ecosystem in support of manufacturing workforce needs in the state.

iii. Business Model. Reviewers will assess the quality, feasibility and potential efficacy and efficiency of the applicant’s proposed business model for the Center as provided in the Project Narrative, Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel, Organizational Structure and Management, and the Budget Tables and Budget Narratives sections of its Technical Proposal, submitted under section IV.2.a.(6). of the corresponding NOFO, and the likelihood that the proposed business model will result in the Center’s ability to successfully execute the strategy evaluated under criterion set forth in paragraph a.1. above and Section V.1.a.i. of the corresponding NOFO, based on the market understanding evaluated under criterion set forth in paragraph a.ii. above and Section V.1.a.ii. of the corresponding NOFO. The following sub-topics will be evaluated and given equal weight:

(1) Outreach and Service Delivery to the Market. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposed Center is organized to:

- identify, reach and provide proposed services to key market segments and individual manufacturers described above;

- work with a manufacturer’s leadership in strategic discussions related to new technologies, new products and new markets; and
- leverage the applicant’s past experience in working with small and medium-sized manufacturers as a basis for future programmatic success.

(2) Partnership Leverage and Linkages. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposed Center 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 in the Center’s business model.

iv. Performance Measurement and Management. 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 oversight for meeting program and service delivery objectives.

b. Qualifications of the Applicant; Key Personnel, Organizational Structure and Management; and Oversight Board or Advisory Committee and Governance (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 and Governance 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 (Refer to Section I.4. of the corresponding NOFO);
- 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 and Governance. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the:

- proposed Oversight Board or Advisory Committee and its operations are complete, appropriate and will meet the program's objectives at the time of award, 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 (expected to be January 1, 2019) is feasible. (Refer to Section I.3. of the corresponding NOFO).
- Oversight Board or Advisory Committee and Governance 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 (Refer to Section I.3. of the corresponding NOFO).

c. Budget and Financial Plan. (30 points; Sub-criteria i and ii will be weighted equally)

Reviewers will assess the suitability and focus of the applicant's five (5) 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 (5) 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 (5) 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. Quality of the Financial 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 support 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 forth in 2 CFR 200, subpart E; and
- the overall proposed financial 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.

Selection Factors: The Selection Factors for this notice as set forth here and in Section V.3. of the corresponding NOFO are as follows:

- a. The availability of Federal funds;
- b. The type and percentage of funding and in-kind commitment from other sources, such as 3rd party In-Kind.
- c. Relevance of the proposed project to MEP program goals and policy objectives;
- d. Reviewers' evaluations, including technical comments;
- e. The geographical diversity and extent of the service area;
- f. Whether the project duplicates other projects funded by DoC or by other Federal agencies; and
- g. Whether the application complements or supports other Administration priorities, or projects supported by DoC or other Federal agencies, such as but not limited to the Manufacturing USA.

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, Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel who enter into or are subject to appropriate confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements covering such information.

(1) Initial Administrative Review of Applications. An initial review of timely received applications will be conducted to determine eligibility, completeness, and responsiveness to this notice and the corresponding NOFO and the scope of the stated program objectives. Applications determined to be ineligible, incomplete, and/or non-responsive 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 that can easily be rectified or cured.

(2) 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 processes below.

(3) Evaluation and Review. Each application will be reviewed by at least three technically qualified individual reviewers who will evaluate each application based on the evaluation criteria (*see* Evaluation Criteria section of this notice and Section V.1. of the corresponding NOFO). Applicants may receive written follow-up questions in order for the reviewers to gain a better understanding of the applicant's proposal. Each reviewer will provide a written technical assessment against the evaluation criteria and based on

that assessment will assign each application a numeric score, with a maximum score of 100. If a non-Federal reviewer is used, the reviewers may discuss the applications with each other, but scores will be determined on an individual basis, not as a consensus.

Applicants whose applications receive an average score of 70 or higher out of 100 will be deemed finalists. If deemed necessary, finalists will be invited to participate with reviewers in a conference call and/or a video conference, and/or finalists will be invited to participate in a site visit that will be conducted by the same reviewers at the applicant's location. In any event, if there are two (2) or more finalists within a state, conference calls, video conferences or site visits will be conducted with each finalist. Finalists will be reviewed and evaluated, and reviewers may revise their assigned numeric scores based on the evaluation criteria (*see* Evaluation Criteria section of this notice and Section V.1. of the corresponding NOFO) as a result of the conference call, video conference, and/or site visit.

(4) Ranking and Selection. Based upon an average of the technical reviewers' final scores, an adjectival rating will be assigned to each application in accordance with the following scale:

Fundable, Outstanding (91-100 points);

Fundable, Very Good (81-90 points);

Fundable (70-80 points); or

Unfundable (0-69 points).

For decision-making purposes, applications receiving the same adjectival rating will be considered to have an equivalent ranking, although their technical review scores, while comparable, may not necessarily be the same.

The Selecting Official is the Director of NIST MEP or her designee. The Selecting Official makes the final recommendation to the NIST Grants Officer regarding the funding of applications under this notice and the corresponding NOFO. The Selecting Official shall be provided all applications, all the scores and technical assessments of the reviewers, and all information obtained from the applicants during the evaluation, review and negotiation processes.

The Selecting Official will generally select and recommend the most meritorious application for an award based on the adjectival rankings and/or one or more of the seven (7) selection factors described in the Selection Factors section of this notice and Section V.3. of the corresponding NOFO. The Selecting Official retains the discretion to select and recommend an application out of rank order (*i.e.*, from a lower adjectival category) based on one or more of the selection factors, or to select and recommend no applications for funding. The Selecting Official's recommendation to the Grants Officer shall set forth the bases for the selection decision.

As part of the overall review and selection process, NIST reserves the right to request that applicants provide pre-award clarifications and/or to enter into pre-award negotiations with applicants relative to programmatic, financial or other aspects of an application, such as but not limited to the revision or removal of proposed budget costs, or the modification of proposed MEP Center activities, work plans or program goals and objectives. In this regard, NIST may request that applicants 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. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NIST Grants Officer. The award decisions of the NIST Grants Officer are final.

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 CFR 200.205, 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 \$150,000), 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 option, 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 conditions that correspond to the degree of risk posed by the applicant should be applied to an award.

Anticipated Announcement and Award Date. Review, selection, and award processing is expected to be completed in late calendar year 2018. The anticipated start date for awards made under this notice and the corresponding NOFO is expected to be January 1, 2019.

Additional Information

- a. 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.

- b. Notification to Unsuccessful Applicants.** Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing.

- c. **Retention of Unsuccessful Applications.** Unsuccessful applications will be retained in accordance with the General Record Schedule 1.2/021, found at <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/grs/grs01-2.pdf>.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements: Through 2. CFR 1327.101, the Department of Commerce adopted the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 CFR part 200, which apply to awards made pursuant to this notice and the corresponding NOFO. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>.

The Department of Commerce 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). If the Department of Commerce publishes revised Pre-Award Notification Requirements prior to issuance of awards under this notice and the corresponding NOFO, the revised Pre-Award Notification Requirements will apply. Refer to Section VII. of the corresponding NOFO, Federal Awarding Agency Contacts, Grant Rules and Regulations for more information.

Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM): Pursuant to 2 CFR part 25, applicants and recipients (as the case may be) 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 CFR 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. 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 notice and the corresponding 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.

Paperwork Reduction Act: The standard forms in the application kit involve a collection of information subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Standard Forms 424, 424A, 424B, and SF-LLL have been approved by OMB under the respective Control Numbers 4040-0004, 4040-0006, 4040-0007, and 0348-0046.

Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act, unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB Control Number.

Certifications Regarding Federal Felony and Federal Criminal Tax Convictions, Unpaid

Federal Tax Assessments and Delinquent Federal Tax Returns. In accordance with Federal appropriations law, an authorized representative of the selected applicant(s) may be required to provide certain pre-award certifications regarding federal felony and federal criminal tax convictions, unpaid federal tax assessments, and delinquent federal tax returns.

Kevin A. Kimball
Chief of Staff

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