

The Evolution from System to Network

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As manufacturers wrestle with increasing demands for advanced technology and integration of it within their facilities and across their supply chains, the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Program has also been in the process of undergoing its own transformation. It's becoming a National Network capable of providing small and medium-sized manufacturers (SMMs) across the United States with access to the resources and expertise they need to manufacture tomorrow. What was originally a program (or “system”) has evolved into a national community of manufacturing experts who work together to devise solutions that are delivered to manufacturers on a local level.

What's Changed About the MEP Program

When it first started, the MEP Program operated as a confederation of regional and state-based Centers. Part of a system, MEP Centers were primarily focused on assisting SMMs in their territories with solutions often developed by in-house experts. While staff members from different Centers interacted with one another as professional colleagues, operational integration between Centers was limited.

This local focus began to shift the late 1990s with the creation of national programs such as Lean 101, which sought to give Centers a uniform starting point for lean manufacturing services with a wide appeal in their operating territories. MEP then built on the success of those initial national programs and responded to the growing need of SMMs to have access to trusted advisors who could serve as guides to the evolving national and global manufacturing landscapes. The MEP Program, headquartered at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), invested in developing additional national programs and forging partnerships to make best-in-class resources and services available to all U.S. manufacturers.

Today, what was once the “MEP system” has evolved to become the MEP National Network™, an integrated organization comprising 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. A unique public-private partnership that delivers comprehensive, proven solutions to U.S. manufacturers, the Network is dedicated to fueling growth and advancing U.S. manufacturing by providing any U.S. manufacturer with access to the resources they need to succeed.

What the Network Offers Manufacturers

What this evolution into a National Network means for SMMs is the ability to connect with comprehensive, impactful business growth and production services via a local point of contact. Let's take a closer look at the four key aspects of the Network that allows it to perform this critical function and deliver on its mission to strengthen and empower U.S. manufacturers.

Expertise

The MEP National Network unites thousands of manufacturing experts across the country. Many of them have run their own manufacturing businesses or worked as part of manufacturing enterprises. They have a first-hand understanding of the challenges faced by SMMs in today's economy and bring this perspective to the table when working with individual manufacturers to identify their needs and deliver solutions.

Within the Network, the level of diversity and specialization is astounding. There are experts in topics relevant to most manufacturers such as continuous improvement, cybersecurity, and workforce development, as well as more specialized areas such as export strategy, food safety, supply chain optimization, and technology scouting.

Comprehensiveness

Not only does the Network include a comprehensive roster of experts in specialized areas where an SMM might need guidance, it has thousands of representatives which manufacturers can use to access all of the collective expertise resident in the Network.

With approximately 2,100 qualified partners connected to the Network above and beyond the 1,300+ trusted advisors and experts at MEP Centers, an official representative is within 2–3 hours of every manufacturer in the U.S.

Dedication

The MEP National Network is a mission-driven organization dedicated to strengthening U.S. manufacturing by engaging one manufacturer at a time to understand their challenges and deliver solutions when and where manufacturers need them. This willingness to work with manufacturers on their own terms — rather than hard-selling them on services they don't need — has earned the Network a Net Promoter Score of 85 (a 50 is considered excellent; 100 is the maximum).

Impact

Every organization that is part of the MEP National Network is held to rigorous measurement standards that prove it produces impactful business results. Collectively, these statistics paint an impressive picture of the effect the Network has on U.S. manufacturing — and offer a compelling reason why individual manufacturers can feel confident about working with Network representatives.

To cite some of the most recent annual statistics, in 2018 the MEP National Network worked with its manufacturing clients to generate:

- \$16.0 billion in new or retained sales
- \$1.7 billion in cost savings
- More than 122,000 jobs created or retained

Accessing the Network

The easiest way to see how the Network works — and to experience the breadth of expertise it provides access to — is by connecting with your local MEP Center. Whether you are a manufacturer or someone with a stake in U.S. manufacturing, you can get in touch with your local MEP National Network representative by using [this interactive map to find your local Center](#) or simply dialing (800) MEP-4MFG.