

MEP ADVISORY BOARD Annual Report 2022



2022 MEP Advisory Board Annual Report

In 2022, the MEP Advisory Board continued its work to advise on the MEP program's plans and strategies. One area that the Board focused on was thinking through possible solutions to the challenges facing U.S. manufacturing. Throughout the pandemic, the Board continued to meet and discuss these issues virtually. In 2022, we began to get together in person once again, bringing increased depth to our discussions.


Strategic planning remained a major theme for the Board in 2022, and strategic planning naturally spurs thoughts of future opportunities and organizational growth. These are exciting times. It's a new era for American manufacturing, and for the MEP National Network™ – with a new strategic plan as its launchpad.

Manufacturing has been critical to the U.S. economy throughout its history. As we approach the 250th anniversary of America's independence, we are confident that manufacturing will continue to be critical to the nation's next 250 years. The new MEP National Network 2023-2027 Strategic Plan will set the course for the organization – and impact the future of U.S. manufacturing.

We live in historic times and this is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The MEP National Network is prepared to lead the way to transform U.S. manufacturing, and the MEP Advisory Board is honored to continue playing its important role as part of the Network.



Matthew B. Newman, Chair
Principal Managing Partner
New Era Advisors
Tulsa, Oklahoma



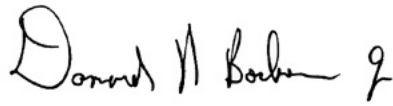
Bernadine Hawes, Vice Chair
Senior Advisor
Econsult Solutions, Inc.
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Ray Aguerrevere
Vice President/General Manager
Custom Metal Designs
Oakland, Florida



Jose Anaya
Dean, Community Advancement
El Camino Community College
Hawthorne, California



Donald Bockoven
Chief Executive Officer
Fiber Industries LLC
Darlington, South Carolina



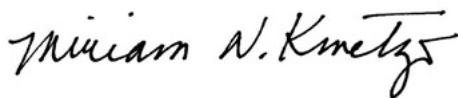
LaDon Byars
President and Chief Executive Officer
Colonial Diversified Polymer Products, LLC
Dyersburg, Tennessee



Peter Connolly
Owner
Connolly Consulting
Cedar Knolls, New Jersey



Mary Isbister
President
GenMet Corporation
Mequon, Wisconsin



Miriam Kmetzo
Executive Vice President
Welding Technology Corp.
Farmington Hills, Michigan



Mitch Magee
Manufacturing Industry Consultant
Hamilton, Ohio



Chris Mathews
Chairman
National Custom Hollow Metal Doors and
Maple Leaf Awning and Canvas
Little Rock, Arkansas



Patricia Moulton
Executive Director, Workforce Development Division
Vermont State Colleges
Lyndonville, Vermont



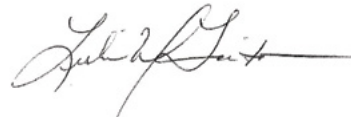
Dr. Annette Parker
President
South Central College
North Mankato, Minnesota



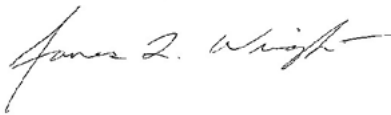
Kathay Rennels
Special Advisor to the Chancellor for
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George Spottswood
Owner and Chief Executive Officer
Quality Filters, Inc.
Robertsdale, Alabama



Leslie Taito
Executive Vice President for Business Operations
Taco Comfort Solutions
Cranston, Rhode Island



Jim Wright
Vice President of Operations
Proof Research
Columbia Falls, Montana

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Manufacturing Extension Partnership Background

Mission and Vision

Mission: Strengthen and empower U.S. manufacturers.

Vision: We are the go-to resource for America's manufacturers ensuring U.S. manufacturing is resilient and leads the world in manufacturing innovation.

Driving Force: We are driven to attain and uphold U.S. manufacturing preeminence which is essential to our nation's long-term economic strength and to protect our national security interests.

Role: The MEP National Network focuses its expertise and knowledge as well as that of its partners (industry, educational institutions, state governments, NIST, and other federal research laboratories and agencies) on providing U.S. manufacturers with information and tools they need to improve productivity, assure consistent quality, accelerate the transfer of manufacturing technology, and infuse innovation into production processes and new products.

Structure

The Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988 created the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program to improve the competitiveness of U.S. based manufacturing by making manufacturing technologies, processes and services more accessible to small and medium-sized manufacturers (SMMs). For over thirty years, the MEP program has focused on bridging the manufacturing productivity gap, identifying opportunities for growth and encouraging technology deployment.

Growing from a pilot project of just three Centers to a system of organizations in every state and Puerto Rico, the 51 MEP Centers are now an integral part of the MEP National Network. The Centers provide their manufacturing customers with a wide array of fundamental services in manufacturing, business and process improvements. Today, the MEP National Network has over 1,400 trusted advisors and experts at approximately 450 MEP Center service locations across the nation. The MEP Centers and their partners, including state governments, universities, community colleges, nonprofit entities, associations and private consultants exist to provide manufacturers with the services needed to reduce bottom-line expenses and grow top-line profits, both of which are needed to thrive in the global marketplace.

Impacts

According to a third-party survey, in fiscal year (FY) 2022, the MEP National Network interacted with more than 33,500 U.S. manufacturers, leading to \$18.8 billion in sales, \$2.5 billion in cost savings, \$6.4 billion in new client investments, and helped create or retain more than 116,700 jobs. These represent increases over FY 2021 in total sales, cost savings and new client investments.

Since 1988, MEP has worked with 142,678 manufacturers, leading to \$144.4 billion in new sales and \$28.7 billion in cost savings, and helping to create and retain over 1.5 million jobs.

NIST MEP Budget

The FY 2022 appropriation for the NIST MEP program was \$158 million, which represented an increase of \$8 million over NIST MEP's FY 2021 funding. Nonfederal cost share requirements were waived for FY 2022 federal funding for MEP Centers, as they have been for the past two years.

Approximately \$134 million of MEP's funding went directly to the MEP Center base awards. Additional funds were awarded competitively to Centers for direct support of the MEP National Network's engagements with manufacturing firms, as well as for enhancing the Network's ability to deliver a greater range of services and to deliver services more efficiently.

CARES Act Results

In 2020, NIST MEP issued \$50 million in federal funds authorized by Congress under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to each MEP Center. NIST MEP made the awards in record time so MEP Centers had the funds available quickly to implement critically needed COVID-19-related projects. The impacts of this funding were collected in FY 2022 and are summarized below.

MEP Centers used CARES Act funding to help manufacturers increase production of personal protective equipment, recover from workforce and supply chain interruptions, and achieve greater resilience. MEP Centers served nearly 5,400 companies with over 7,500 CARES Act-funded projects. CARES Act project clients surveyed report more than \$3.6 billion in new and retained sales, over \$1.7 billion in new investments and over \$530 million in total cost savings. These projects resulted in over 36,000 jobs created or retained. Nearly half of the over 5,000 companies served were first-time MEP Center clients, expanding the reach of the program.

CARES Act funding enabled MEP Centers in every state to assist companies in new and different ways that included helping protect their workforce during the pandemic, finding sources of capital, stabilizing their supply chains, and protecting manufacturers from cybersecurity threats. CARES Act funding has enabled MEP Centers to provide manufacturers with additional services such as:

- Assessing the extent and nature of the disruption caused by the pandemic
- Rethinking and retooling service delivery
- Forging new and strengthening existing state partnerships
- Helping manufacturers pivot operations to produce personal protective equipment, medical supplies and medical devices
- Implementing supplier databases for searching and matching
- Tailoring services for operating in the post-pandemic environment

CARES Act Stories

MEP Centers nationwide used CARES Act funding to help their states' manufacturers recover from the economic downturn. NIST MEP published a report, [Impacts of CARES Act Funding Across the MEP National Network](#) and the accompanying [CARES Act Stories from Across the MEP National Network](#) which provides a state-by-state listing of selected projects and initiatives made possible by CARES Act funding.

The following examples illustrate a few of the thousands of ways that MEP Centers provided assistance to manufacturers with CARES Act funding.

[The Texas MEP Center helped a firm expand and find domestic suppliers during the pandemic.](#)

Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center, TMAC, the MEP Center in Texas, used CARES Act funds to help Southside Plants expand and find domestic suppliers. Before the pandemic, the home-based firm manufactured innovative technologies for houseplant propagation. Through aggressive e-commerce marketing, company sales increased tremendously. The firm needed to scale-up production quickly, just as pandemic-related supply chain disruptions hit. TMAC assisted with domestic supplier matching and quickly sketched out a solution to scale-up production. Tapping into the MEP National Network, TMAC connected with Arkansas Manufacturing Solutions, the Arkansas MEP Center, to identify a manufacturer that had the equipment and capacity to manufacture and package Southside's products and fuel its expansion.

[Maine MEP helped a woman-owned firm expand efficiently into a new facility to prepare for future growth.](#)

Atlantic Sea Farms' woman-led team creates a variety of healthy food products sourced from Maine farmers and fishing families. The pandemic resulted in a sharp decline in restaurant and retail orders. However, the firm remained committed to its strategic growth goals and to fulfilling harvest contracts with local fish and lobster harvesters. As a result, the 2021 harvest was too large for their processing space. They turned to Maine MEP, which used CARES Act funds to develop a plan for a new facility with hugely expanded processing space. Using lean manufacturing principles, the new layout allows not just for current needs, but enables future growth.

[Virginia's MEP Center provided marketing support to help launch biodegradable and sustainable products.](#)

The GO Virginia Reshoring Program, led by GENEDGE Alliance, the Virginia MEP Center, helps the state's manufacturers grow their capacity and capabilities. Through the program, Drake Extrusion, Inc., received assistance developing environmental, sustainable and green (ESG) solutions to meet their customers' emerging needs. After working with GENEDGE on developing and testing new products, Drake requested marketing support. With CARES Act funds, GENEDGE worked with a third-party contractor to develop creative concepts for integrating sustainability into Drake's website. GENEDGE and the contractor helped identify the top messages for Drake to communicate, define website navigation and marketing objectives, draft copy and develop custom page templates to help customers find the new ESG products and spur sales.

About the MEP Advisory Board

The statutory purpose of the Board is to provide advice and recommendations to the NIST Director on the following items:

- The activities, plans and policies of the MEP program
- The soundness of the program's plans and strategies
- Current performance in relation to MEP program plans

The MEP Advisory Board consists of members broadly representing the interests and needs of the manufacturing sector appointed by the NIST Director. By statute, at least two members must be on an MEP Center board and at least five other members must represent small U.S. businesses from the manufacturing sector. In addition, at least one Board member must represent a community college. Board members are limited to two consecutive, full three-year terms and are ineligible for reappointment for a year following the expiration of their second term. In addition, the law requires the Board to meet at least twice per year. In FY 2022, the Board met three times to perform its chartered functions.

Several changes occurred to Board membership in 2022. Jose Anaya and Kathay Rennels left the Board. Their leadership and advice over their years of service, and their time and commitment to the MEP Advisory Board are appreciated. Peter Connolly, a longtime Chair of the New Jersey MEP's board, joined the MEP Advisory Board in 2022, but resigned later in the year. Chris Mathews joined the Board in 2022. He is the Chairman of National Custom Hollow Metal Doors and Maple Leaf Awning and Canvas in Little Rock, Arkansas. Dr. Annette Parker also joined the Board in 2022. Dr. Parker is the President of South Central College in North Mankato, Minnesota. This brings the Board roster to 14 members going into FY 2023.

The current Board members represent the diversity of the U.S. manufacturing industry, from CEOs and executives at various-sized manufacturing companies to academic leaders at both state and community colleges. The important and varied perspectives of these volunteers have and will continue to positively impact the MEP program into the future.

2022 MEP Advisory Board Members

MATTHEW NEWMAN, CHAIR

Second term expires March 2023

Matthew Newman is the Principal Managing Partner of New Era Advisors. He has diverse and extensive expertise in business development, management and advocacy for sustainability. Mr. Newman is an entrepreneur and intrapreneur whose career has focused on innovation, business development, business management, modernization initiatives, environmental, social and governance facilitation, and leveraging and improving core assets and mission-critical initiatives. He specializes in renewable energy, low carbon solutions, novel technologies, logistics and optimization, electricity generation, natural gas, financial derivatives and risk management, identifying profit opportunities in the sustainability spectrum, and building collaborative relationships at the local, state and federal levels. Mr. Newman has a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Oklahoma. He is an active volunteer serving on boards and task forces on state and local levels. He has been a guest lecturer at several colleges and universities.

BERNADINE HAWES, VICE CHAIR

First term expires July 2024

Bernadine Hawes is an executive level, nonprofit professional and economic development specialist working in the areas of manufacturing strategy, small business growth, and project management workforce development. She is a Senior Advisor at Econsult Solutions, Inc. which provides robust quantitative analysis with trusted expert insights and impactful implementation to businesses and the public sector in urban economics, real estate economics, public infrastructure, public policy, and community and neighborhood development and planning. Her long career includes her work as Technology Specialist for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in crafting the state's "Blueprint for Technology" and leadership roles on regional and national manufacturing industry boards, including past chair of the MEP Advisory Board. Born and raised in Washington, D.C., Ms. Hawes has a Master of Science from the University of Pennsylvania and is a summa cum laude graduate of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. She has been the national co-chair of Penn's Black Alumni Society and is a former member of the University of Pennsylvania's James Brister Society for Diversity Inclusion.



RAY AGUERREVERE

First term expires October 2023

Ray Aguerrevere is the Vice President/General Manager for Custom Metal Designs, located in Oakland, Florida. Custom Metal Designs is an industry leader that designs and manufactures turnkey industrial automation solutions that include collaborative and industrial robotics, autonomous vehicles and complex conveyor systems for clients worldwide. Mr. Aguerrevere has led the company through a technological transformation resulting in a tripling of revenues since 2005. Mr. Aguerrevere has a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance from the University of Central Florida and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Florida. He serves as president on the board of the Manufacturers Association of Central Florida and is board chair of the FloridaMakes (the Florida MEP Center) board of directors.

JOSE ANAYA

Second term expired July 2022

Jose Anaya oversees the El Camino Community College District's Community Advancement Division and Business Training Center as the Dean. Prior to joining the staff at El Camino College, he directed economic development programs at Cerritos College. Under Mr. Anaya's guidance, Cerritos College received numerous honors and recognition related to workforce development. These included a best practices award for its partnership with Lockheed Martin and selection by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and its partners as one of five national exemplary models for expanding postsecondary education and training opportunities for Hispanic workers. Mr. Anaya's earlier experiences include work in the private sector with corporations such as Honeywell, ITT Industries and DataCard. He has broad experience and expertise in the areas of product design, manufacturing and management, as well as economic and workforce development. Mr. Anaya has a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and a Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in entrepreneurship from the University of Southern California.



DONALD BOCKOVEN

Second term expires October 2025

Donald Bockoven is the CEO for Fiber Industries LLC, a textile production operation based in Darlington, South Carolina. He has extensive experience over a nearly forty year career as a senior leader within both large and small companies across many industries. He specializes in transformational company growth through performance improvement. He has extensive knowledge in organizational redesign through Lean Six Sigma manufacturing practices, adaptive and advanced work systems and quality management. Mr. Bockoven has extensive board experience. He currently sits on the South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership Board and recently left the South Carolina Manufacturers Association Board. At the national level, he was the vice chair of the National Council of Textile Organization's board until April 2019 and in 2018 was appointed to the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations for a four-year term. He has also served on technical advisory boards at the community college level as well as startup companies.

LADON BYARS

Second term expires February 2023

LaDon Byars is the President and CEO of Colonial Diversified Polymer Products, LLC of Dyersburg, Tennessee. Colonial Diversified produces high-quality rubber products for a wide variety of industries including automotive, defense, commercial building, construction, farm equipment, aerospace, computers, medical, telecommunications, recreation, health, entertainment, plumbing, refrigeration and many more. She started out as a financial analyst and rose to become president of the company. Ms. Byars is very active in the manufacturing community, has received many awards and is on the advisory board of the University of Tennessee Center for Industrial Services which houses the Tennessee MEP Center.



PETER CONNOLLY

Resigned from the Board September 2022

Peter Connolly has held numerous operational, program, corporate development, business development and management positions throughout his 40 year career. He began his career at DRS, where he held key management positions including Vice President of Business Development and Vice President/General Manager. Most recently he was President of Shocktech, Inc., a leading manufacturer of custom solutions for shock, vibration and noise challenges in the aerospace and defense industries. Through his efforts, Shocktech doubled in size over four years. Mr. Connolly excels at developing new business strategy and relationship selling, manufacturing, business development, and increasing business through customer service. He has extensive international business development experience, including both direct commercial and foreign military sales contracts. Mr. Connolly earned a bachelor's degree from Glassboro State College. He has been on the board of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Partnership and serves as the current chair.

MARY ISBISTER

Second term expires March 2023

Mary Isbister is President of GenMet Corporation, a custom metal fabricating company located in Mequon, Wisconsin. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in chemistry, she worked at Pfizer in Groton, Connecticut for 11 years. During her tenure at Pfizer she held positions in medicinal chemistry, clinical research and senior organizational development. In 1997, she moved to Wisconsin and founded Synergy Solutions, an organizational development and strategic planning consulting business, which she ran until 2001. In 1999 Ms. Isbister and her husband purchased GenMet Corporation, a custom manufacturer specializing in high value-added metal fabrications and enclosures. From 2010-2014 Ms. Isbister also served on the U.S. Manufacturing Council, reporting to the Secretary of Commerce.



MIRIAM KMETZO

First term expires July 2024

Miriam Kmetzo is the Executive Vice President for Welding Technology Corp., a global leader in resistance welding and industrial automation based in Farmington Hills, Michigan. She has a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a Master of Science in management from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Ms. Kmetzo began her career in process and quality management and has held various positions in manufacturing for over 30 years. She joined Welding Technology Corp. in 1996 as a Quality Manager and rose to become Executive Vice President with responsibilities for human resources, operations and quality. In addition to her passion for manufacturing, Ms. Kmetzo is equally passionate about performance excellence. Ms. Kmetzo is honored to have served a three-year term on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award judging panel and continues to be actively involved in both the national and state Baldrige programs.

MITCH MAGEE

Second term expires March 2023

Mitch Magee is the retired Director of Global Advanced Manufacturing Technology for PPG's aerospace business unit. He has over 40 years of manufacturing experience, having served in capacities from front-line plant operations to global quality and environment, health and safety roles in PPG's automotive, industrial, and food and beverage package coatings business units. Mr. Magee is also actively engaged in workforce development as the past chair of the Delaware Manufacturing Association and led the development of Delaware's first Pathways to Prosperity high school manufacturing technology program. This program was developed in conjunction with Gov. Jack Markell's administration, Delaware Technical and Community College, and local high schools. Mr. Magee has also served on the Delaware Workforce Development Board, boards of Western Pennsylvania Air and Waste Management Association, Delaware Technical Community College-Terry Campus, Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce and as a Pickaway County, Ohio trustee. He has a Bachelor of Science in liberal arts from Allegheny College, a Master of Science in chemical engineering from the University of Pittsburgh and is a licensed professional engineer.



CHRIS MATHEWS

First term expires May 2025

Chris Mathews is the Chairman of National Custom Hollow Metal Doors and Maple Leaf Awning and Canvas. Mr. Mathews is passionate about operational excellence achieved through training, innovation and building long-term trusting relationships. He has taken an active role in economic development, serving from 2006-2016 as a Director on the Little Rock Port Authority, including two years as Chair. More recently, he has served on the Arkansas Manufacturing Solutions (Arkansas MEP Center) advisory board and on the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. He is currently serving a three-year appointment by Gov. Asa Hutchinson on the Arkansas Science and Technology Board of Directors, serving as a Director and a member of the commercialization committee.

PATRICIA MOULTON

Second term expires June 2024

In July 2022, Patricia Moulton was appointed Executive Director of the Vermont State Colleges' new Workforce Development Division. The division will launch in July 2023 and incorporate workforce programming at a number of institutions in the Vermont State Colleges System. Ms. Moulton previously served as the first woman President of Vermont Technical College. Vermont Technical College is part of the Vermont State Colleges System and the only technical college in the state. Prior to that, Ms. Moulton served as secretary of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development. Ms. Moulton has served in a variety of appointed positions in Vermont state government, having been appointed by four different governors. She has served as commissioner of labor in addition to several economic development-related appointments. She has also served as appointed chair of an environmental regulatory board for the state of Vermont. Ms. Moulton spent 35 years in the practice of economic development on the local, regional and state levels. She has worked as executive director of four different regional economic development corporations in Vermont. She also ran her own economic development consulting company for several years. Ms. Moulton is a graduate of the University of Vermont with a degree in political science.



DR. ANNETTE PARKER

First term expires May 2025

Dr. Annette Parker is currently President of South Central College (SCC). At SCC, she collaborated with Minnesota State University to develop transfer pathways for students. South Central College was awarded a Minnesota state center of excellence in agriculture, that has developed a national curriculum and assessments for the National Pork Board. She served on President Obama's Advanced Manufacturing Partnership, making recommendations to sustain and grow American manufacturing competitiveness. In this role she successfully developed a Minnesota collaboration that secured a \$15 million grant to implement the national strategies within the state. Since her arrival, South Central College has been awarded over \$20 million in grants and nearly doubled its foundation's capital campaign. She is a graduate of Lansing Community College and was selected as their 2015 alumni of the year.

KATHAY RENNELS

Second term expired February 2022

Kathay Rennels is the Special Advisor to the Chancellor for Rural-Urban Initiatives at Colorado State University (CSU) and works to advance collaborative networks across the state and create economic development opportunities. She has significant experience fostering public and private partnerships in regional and rural workforce development, with particular attention to Larimer and Weld Counties. Ms. Rennels previously served three terms as a Larimer County commissioner and is now leading the Food and Agriculture Key Industry Network for the state of Colorado. Ms. Rennels helped initiate the "Value Chain of Colorado Agriculture" study released in February 2013 and coauthored the November 2014 follow-up study, "The Emergence of an Innovation Cluster in the Agricultural Value Chain Along Colorado's Front Range." She also initiated the Advancing the Agricultural Economy Through Innovation summit held at CSU in March 2015. Ms. Rennels was the president of Colorado Counties Inc. and named commissioner of the year. She currently serves on the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado, El Pomar Foundation and Manufacturer's Edge, the Colorado MEP Center, as a board member.



GEORGE SPOTTSWOOD

Second term expires May 2023

George Spottswood is Owner and CEO of Quality Filters, Inc. (QFI) in Robertsdale, Alabama. QFI was incorporated in 1981 in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Mr. Spottswood and his father, Horace Spottswood, purchased the business in 1983. At the time of purchase, QFI employed eight associates and operated out of a 10,000-square foot rented facility, manufacturing a single HVAC air filter product. Today, QFI employs 150 associates and operates out of a 70,000-square foot corporate-owned facility. He has served two terms as associate council president of the National Air Filtration Association (NAFA) as well as served on several NAFA committees in varying roles. Mr. Spottswood has been involved with the Alabama Technology Network (ATN, Alabama's MEP Center) since 2005. He was named 2005 ATN Business Innovator of the Year for the state of Alabama. Other corporate awards include the 2011 Innovator of the Year Award for Alabama by the Southern Growth Policy Board.

LESLIE TAITO

Second term expires July 2023

Leslie Taito is the Executive Vice President for Business Operations at Taco Comfort Solutions. Taco is a 100-year-old, third generation family-owned global company based in Cranston, Rhode Island that engineers and manufactures high-efficiency indoor heating, cooling and plumbing comfort systems. Using her over 25 years of management and manufacturing experience, she is responsible for Taco's global supply chain, logistics and quality. Previously, she served as Chief of Staff at Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, and she was CEO of Hope Global, a manufacturer of textile products and engineering solutions. She was also the Director of Regulatory Reform for the Rhode Island Office of Management and Budget. She has held leadership positions as the CEO for the Rhode Island Manufacturing Extension Services, Inc., Executive Director of the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association, and Acting Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer of the Rhode Island Regional Employment and Training Board. In addition to serving on the MEP Advisory Board, Ms. Taito is a member of the Polaris MEP (the Rhode Island MEP Center) Advisory Board. She also has served by appointment of the governor on the Rhode Island Manufacturing Advisory Council and the Lean Government Initiative. Actively involved in her community, Ms. Taito has served in executive board leadership positions and as chair of the Northern Rhode Island and North Kingstown Chambers of Commerce.

JIM WRIGHT

Second term expires March 2023

Jim Wright is the Vice President of Operations for Proof Research, located in Columbia Falls, Montana. Proof Research is an industry leader that designs and manufactures state-of-the-art carbon fiber composite firearms for both military and commercial applications. Mr. Wright has over 25 years of experience in manufacturing engineering and production management across the aerospace, automotive, semiconductor and firearms industries. Throughout his professional career, he has spent a significant amount of time abroad working with European and Asian companies, and brings a passion to apply best-in-class concepts and lean manufacturing principles to help improve manufacturing within the U.S. He holds a Bachelor of Science and Master of Business Administration from Southern Illinois University and was a member of the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (Montana's MEP Center) advisory board for six years, serving in both the vice president and president roles. He is active in the local community and serves on the board of directors for the Kalispell City Chamber of Commerce.

2023 MEP Advisory Board Activities

Advisory Board Meetings

The MEP Advisory Board members were joined by leadership and staff from NIST, NIST MEP, MEP Centers, and by MEP program stakeholders for three meetings in 2022:

- March 9 (held virtually, due to the pandemic)
- June 8 in Tulsa, Oklahoma (with some virtual participation)
- Sept. 20 in Chicago, Illinois

Detailed MEP Advisory Board [meeting minutes](#) are available on the NIST MEP website.

NIST Associate Director for Innovation and Industry Services Mojdeh Bahar provided opening remarks and attended each of the Board meetings. James Olthoff, who was performing the nonexclusive functions and duties of the Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology and Director of NIST, offered welcoming remarks at the March meeting. Laurie Locascio, the new Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology and Director of NIST, spoke at the June meeting.

At each meeting, the Board received detailed updates from NIST MEP leadership on programmatic operations and performance regarding the MEP National Network 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, including progress toward meeting its goals. Each meeting included presentations and high level discussions on various topics integral to the program and to manufacturing. These included developing partnerships, succession planning, current manufacturing trends, and potential MEP expansion awards. The March meeting included report outs from the Board's three working groups: the MEP National Network Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Working Group, the Supply Chain Development Working Group and the Executive Committee Working Group.

The September Board meeting was co-located with and held before the Foundation for Manufacturing Excellence's Center Best Practices Conference in Chicago, Illinois. Many MEP Advisory Board members also participated in the MEP National Network Update Meeting held just before the Board meeting in Chicago. This Board meeting featured an overview of the draft MEP National Network 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. In addition, the Board discussed potential focus areas for future working groups.

These three Board meetings provided opportunities for Board members to discuss the constantly changing issues facing manufacturers, stay current on the latest trends in manufacturing, advise the NIST Director about the MEP program, and to actively engage with MEP Center Directors and other stakeholders.

Advisory Board Working Group Focus Areas

At the September 2022 meeting, the Board discussed focus areas for future working groups. Two existing working groups will continue:

- Advisory Board Executive Committee Working Group
- Strategic Goal: Mitigate Supply Chain Vulnerabilities Working Group (previously called Supply Chain Development Working Group)

In addition, three new working groups in 2023 will be:

- Strategic Goal: Narrow the Workforce Gap Working Group
- Strategic Goal: Leverage Technology Working Group
- MEP National Network Expansion Awards – Ad Hoc Working Group

Strategic Planning

MEP National Network 2017-2022 Strategic Plan

The Advisory Board continued to review and discuss the progress made on the MEP National Network 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, which concluded in September 2022. The 2017-2022 strategic plan's four principal goals included: Empower Manufacturers, Champion Manufacturing, Leverage Partnerships, and Transform the Network. The [full plan is available](#) on the NIST MEP website.

At each meeting, the Board was provided with updates on progress toward goals for the MEP National Network 2017-2022 Strategic Plan's final 18-month period. These included strengthening the supply chain, serving the manufacturing workforce, increasing Network brand awareness, and leading in technology deployment. Steady progress toward these 18-month goals was seen across the Network, with nearly all the goals met or exceeded. This information is available in the [Board meeting minutes](#) posted on the NIST MEP website.

The MEP National Network 2017-2022 Strategic Plan successfully guided the development of an integrated network over the past five years. The MEP National Network is now a reality.

MEP National Network 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

The draft MEP National Network 2023-2027 Strategic Plan was presented to the Board at the September 2022 meeting. The central tenets of the new strategic plan continue to be: Empower Manufacturers, Champion Manufacturing, Leverage Partnerships, and Transform the Network.

The 2023-2027 strategic plan focuses on new program themes of supply chain, workforce, and technology and innovation. The [full plan is available](#) on the NIST MEP website. The primary goals of the 2023-2027 strategic plan are:

- **Narrow the workforce gap:** Enable SMMs to navigate the current workforce shortage while improving productivity and profitability, build a pipeline of future employees for the manufacturing sector
- **Mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities:** Increase supply chain visibility, assess supply chain risk
- **Leverage technology:** Increase technology adoption, ensure wholistic, comprehensive application and use of technology, strengthen cybersecurity capabilities, partner with federal labs to accelerate the use of new technologies

The 2023-2027 strategic plan will guide the MEP National Network toward these goals through strategies to embrace future growth, broaden and deepen expertise, strengthen relationships and influence with state authorities and agencies, expand collaboration with other Centers and participation in the MEP National Network, and develop and exercise convening power to build strategic partnerships in each state and regionally.

This new strategic plan will provide strategic direction for MEP National Network members and partners, but the implementation of those strategies will reside with each of the individuals who make up the Network, enabling and empowering them to craft the most effective means of execution for their contexts.



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