solicitation. The center will enhance the ability of small businesses to implement risk based pollution prevention alternatives to increase competitiveness and reduce adverse environmental impacts. The center should use existing resources, information and expertise and will avoid duplication of existing efforts. The information provided by the center will create links between relevant EPA Pollution Prevention programs, EPA and other technical information, NIST manufacturing extension efforts, EPA regulation and guidance, and state requirements. The center will emphasize pollution prevention methods as the principal means to both comply with government regulations and enhance competitiveness.

(c) Project goal. To improve the environmental and competitive performance of smaller manufacturers by:

(1) Enhancing the national capability to provide pollution prevention and regulatory requirements information (federal, state and local) to specific

(2) Providing easy access to relevant and reliable information and tools on pollution prevention technologies and techniques that achieve manufacturing efficiency and enhanced competitiveness with reduced environmental impact.

(3) Providing easy access to relevant and reliable information and tools to enable specific industries to achieve the continued environmental improvement to meet or exceed compliance

requirements.

- (d) Project customers. (1) The customers for this center will be the businesses in the industrial sector or businesses which use the industrial process specified as the focus for the solicitation. In addition, consultants providing services to those businesses, the NIST Manufacturing Extension Centers, and federal state and local programs providing technical, pollution prevention and compliance assistance.
- (2) The center should assist the customer in choosing the most costeffective, environmentally sound options or practices that enhance the company's competitiveness. Assistance must be accessible to all interested customers. The center, wherever feasible, shall use existing materials and information to enhance and develop the services to its customers. The centers should rarely, if ever, perform research, but should find and assimilate data and information produced by other sources. The center should not duplicate any existing distribution system. The center should distribute and provide information, but should not directly

provide on-site assistance to customers. Rather, referrals to local technical assistance organizations should be given when appropriate. Information would likely be available through multiple avenues such as phone, fax, electronically accessible data bases, printed material, networks of technical experts, etc.

- (e) Award period. The pilot initiated under this category may be carried out over multiple years. The proposers should include optional second and third years in their proposal. Proposals selected for award may receive one, two or three years of funding from currently available finds at the discretion of DOC. If an application is selected for funding, DOC has no obligation to provide any additional future funding in connection with that award. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the total discretion of DOC. Successful centers may be given an opportunity to receive continuing funding as a NIST manufacturing center after the expiration of their initial cooperative agreement. Such a roll-over will be based upon the performance of the center and availability of funding.
- (f) Matching requirements. A matching contribution from each applicant will be required. NIST may provide financial support up to 50% of the total budget for the project. The applicant's share of the budget may include dollar contributions from state, county, industrial or other non-federal sources and non-federal in-kind contributions necessary and reasonable for proper accomplishment of project objectives.

(g) Resource center evaluation criteria. Proposals from applicants will be evaluated and rated on the basis of the following criteria listed in descending order of importance:

- (1) Demonstrated understanding of the environmentally-related information needs of manufacturers and technical assistance providers in the target population. Understanding the environmentally-related needs of the target population (i.e., customers) is absolutely critical to the success of such a resource center. Factors that may be considered include: A clear definition of the target population, size and demographic distribution; demonstrated understanding of the target population's environmentally-related information needs or a clear plan for identifying those customer needs; and methodologies for continually improving the understanding of the target population's environmentallyrelated information needs.
- (2) Delivery mechanisms. The proposal must set forth clearly defined,

effective mechanisms for delivery of services to target population. Factors that may be considered include: Potential effectiveness and efficiency of proposed delivery systems; and demonstrated capacity to form the effective linkages and partnerships necessary for success of the proposed activity.

(3) Technology and information sources. The proposal must delineate the sources of information which will be used to create the informational foundation of the resource center. Sources may include those internal to the Center (including staff expertise), but it is expected that many sources will be external. Factors that may be considered include: Strength of core competency in the proposed area of activity; demonstrated access to relevant technical or information sources external to the organization.

(4) Degree of integration with the manufacturing extension partnership and other technical assistance providers. The proposal must demonstrate that the source center will be integrated into the system of services provided by the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partnership and other technical assistance providers. Factors that may be considered include: Ability of the target population including MEP Extension Centers to access the resource center; and methodology for disseminating or promoting use of the resource center especially within the

MEP system.

- (5) Coordination with other relevant organizations. Wherever possible the project should be coordinated with and leverage other organizations which are developing or have expertise on similar tools or techniques. If no such organizations exist, the proposal should show that this is the case. Applicants will need to describe how they will coordinate to allow for increased economies of scale and to avoid duplication. Factors that may be considered include: Demonstrated understanding of existing organizations and resources relevant to the proposed project; and adequate linkages and partnerships with existing organizations and clear definition of those organizations' roles in the proposed activities.
- (6) *Program evaluation.* The applicant should specify plans for evaluation of the effectiveness of the proposed resource center and for ensuring continuous improvement. Factors that may be considered include: Thoroughness of evaluation plans, including internal evaluation for management control, external evaluation for assessing outcomes of the