

§ 290.7

(iii) *Internal evaluation.* Effectiveness of the planned continuous internal evaluation of program activities.

(iv) *Plans for financial matching.* Demonstrated stability and duration of the applicant's funding commitments as well as the percentage of operating and capital costs guaranteed by the applicant. Identification of matching fund sources and the general terms of the funding commitments. Evidence of the applicant's ability to become self-sustaining in six years.

(v) *Budget.* Suitability and focus of the applicant's detailed one-year budget and six-year budget outline.

§ 290.7 Proposal selection process.

Upon the availability of funding to establish Regional Centers, the Director shall publish a notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER requesting submission of proposals from interested organizations. Applicants will be given an established time frame, not less than 60 days from the publication date of the notice, to prepare and submit a proposal. The proposal evaluation and selection process will consist of four principal phases: Proposal qualification; Proposal review and selection of finalists; Finalist site visits; and, Award determination. Further descriptions of these phases are provided in the following:

(a) *Proposal qualification.* All proposals will be reviewed by NIST to assure compliance with § 290.5 of these procedures. Proposals which satisfy these requirements will be designated qualified proposals; all others will be disqualified at this phase of the evaluation and selection process.

(b) *Proposal review and selection of finalists.* The Director of NIST will appoint an evaluation panel to review and evaluate all qualified proposals in accordance with the criteria set forth in section 290.6 of these procedures, assigning equal weight to each of the four categories. From the qualified proposals, a group of finalists will be selected based on this review.

(c) *Finalist site visits.* NIST representatives will visit each finalist organization. Finalists will be reviewed and assigned numeric scores using the criteria set forth in § 290.6 of these procedures assigning equal weight to each of

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the four categories. NIST may enter into negotiations with the finalists concerning any aspect of their proposal.

(d) *Award determination.* The Director of NIST or his designee shall select awardees for Center Operating Awards based upon the rank order of applicants, the need to assure appropriate regional distribution, and the availability of funds. Upon the final award decision, a notification will be made to each of the proposing organizations.

§ 290.8 Reviews of centers.

(a) *Overview.* Each Center will be reviewed at least annually, and at the end of its third year of operation according to the procedures and criteria set out below. There will be regular management interaction with NIST and the other Centers for the purpose of evaluation and program shaping. Centers are encouraged to try new approaches, must evaluate their effectiveness, and abandon or adjust those which do not have the desired impact.

(b) *Annual reviews of centers.* Centers will be reviewed annually as part of the funding renewal process using the criteria set out in § 290.8(d). The funding level at which a Center is renewed is contingent upon a positive program evaluation and will depend upon the availability of federal funds and on the Center's ability to obtain suitable match, as well as on the budgetary requirements of its proposed program. Centers must continue to demonstrate that they will be self-supporting after six years.

(c) *Third year review of centers.* Each host receiving a Center Operating Award under these procedures shall be evaluated during its third year of operation by a Merit Review Panel appointed by the Secretary of Commerce. Each such Merit Review Panel shall be composed of private experts, none of whom shall be connected with the involved Center, and Federal officials. An official of NIST shall chair the panel. Each Merit Review Panel shall measure the involved Center's performance against the criteria set out in § 290.8(d). The Secretary shall not provide funding for the fourth through the sixth years of such Center's operation unless the evaluation is positive on all