Manufacturing faces a serious skills gap. Part of this gap is the underrepresentation of women in the industry. While women make up approximately 47 percent of the labor force, that number is only about 29 percent in the manufacturing labor force.

With the looming talent shortage, the industry has an opportunity to mitigate the gap by encouraging more women join the ranks of manufacturing employees.

The Manufacturing Institute launched the STEP Ahead initiative to honor and promote the role of women in the manufacturing industry through recognition, research, and leadership. STEP Ahead is a national initiative that includes an annual awards gala, and to continue the momentum, STEP Forward brings the STEP Ahead initiative regionally into your community.

STEP Forward gives manufacturers an opportunity to raise awareness of their company and manufacturing as a whole, by showcasing existing female talent and providing unique leadership opportunities to develop talent.

"The STEP workshop transformed and inspired my career to high levels of aspirations. I’ve gained valuable tools, insight, motivation, and network connections to move forward my career in the direction I want." 
Addie M. Lordemann, Senior Manufacturing Engineer, 3M, 2016 STEP Ahead Honoree

"Women attending the event are still buzzing, and I’ve gotten lots of emails and LinkedIn requests from young women who were both encouraged and inspired.” 
Marcia Kull, Vice President, Volvo Penta of the Americas, 2016 STEP Ahead Honoree

Participants make a personal pledge to advance women in manufacturing and promote the importance of a diverse workforce in the industry through the following actions:
• Leverage your strengths for personal development
• Engage and/or mentor young women/girls
• Advocate as an ambassador for the manufacturing industry
• Develop your network to generate ideas and share best practices

STEP Forward offers companies a unique opportunity to strengthen their diversity strategy. It mobilizes women to act as a catalyst for change within their company and their community. The STEP pledge amplifies current company activities and helps formalize strategies into action. It can be leveraged with company affinity groups and individual actions, all connecting to a larger national manufacturing strategy.
Women who LEAD by Example

LEAD by Example is designed to show participants what good leadership looks like within the company.

As part of the STEP Forward event, the Institute will work with sponsoring companies to identify internal leaders with powerful stories to share.

STEP Forward Reception and Personal Commitment

The STEP Forward event culminates with a reception, sharing lessons learned, and offering a personal commitment. Women are encouraged to invite their company sponsor to the reception to share their experience and thank them for their support.

Program Elements

- **Leading from Strengths** engages women leaders in understanding how to leverage their strengths and apply them on the job.
- **Building your Networks** enables individuals to pay it forward by finding connections and offering solutions among colleagues.
- **LEAD by Example** puts company leaders on a platform to answer the questions early career women are often afraid to ask.
- **STEP Forward Reception and Personal Commitment** amplifies individual and company impact on engaging a diverse workforce.

Cost of Engagement

The STEP Forward Development Program can be modified to meet the need of a company or sponsoring organization. As a 501-(c)3 focused on building the manufacturing workforce, The Manufacturing Institute is positioned to deliver STEP Forward at a competitive market cost to manufacturers.

88% of STEP Ahead Alumnae say it has increased their level of engagement in developing others.

75% say STEP Ahead has increased visibility of opportunities for women.
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