STEP (Science, Technology, Engineering, Production) Women’s Initiative

In many ways, manufacturing has never been doing better. More than 9 in 10 manufacturers are optimistic about the future, according to the latest National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) Economic Outlook Survey, yet more than 7 in 10 manufacturers are seriously concerned about their ability to find the skilled workers they’ll need to continue growing. Today, more than half a million (522,000) manufacturing jobs are going unfilled already. Over the next decade, nearly five times as many (2.4 million) could go unfilled.

There are a variety of reasons for the skills-gap workforce crisis, but there is one certainty underpinning everything: this crisis threatens the future of America’s most iconic industry, and our economy as a whole, unless we get it under control.

The Manufacturing Institute launched the STEP women’s initiative to support women in science, engineering, production, and technology careers and inspire more to join them. Why is this important?

- **It’s the right thing to do:** Women today account for less than a third of manufacturers (29%) despite representing almost half of all workers (47%). Yet it’s manufacturing that set the stage for a decades-long march of women into the workforce. Women in previous generations showed the country what they could do through manufacturing and it’s on us to inspire girls in the next generation to dream of what they can do through manufacturing too.

- **It's critical to solving the workforce crisis.** Women represent one of the largest pools of untapped talent for manufacturers. Thus, closing manufacturing’s gender gap is key to closing the skills gap too. Moreover, research shows that gender diversity benefits a manufacturing firm by improving its ability to innovate and grow.

STEP is dedicated to fostering a 21st century manufacturing workforce that gives women the recognition and support they deserve and does so primarily through two different programs. **STEP Forward** works to educate manufacturers on attracting and retaining women employees through regional outreach events and an online community. **STEP Ahead** focuses on honoring the best of the best female leaders in the manufacturing industry now and then arms them with the tools to pay it forward and inspire, engage and mentor the next generation through an annual awards gala and associated leadership training program. By honoring current and existing leaders we are building and elevating the role models that can inspire the next generation – and we are building the networks for women to have support in their industry and do even more.

**2020 STEP AHEAD AWARDS**

The 2020 STEP Ahead Awards will take place on April 30, 2020 at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

The eighth annual STEP Ahead Awards will recognize women in science, technology, engineering and production careers who exemplify leadership within their companies. This national honor identifies top talent in the manufacturing industry, and further encourages award winners to mentor and support the next generation of female talent to pursue manufacturing careers.

The STEP Ahead Awards gives women across the country a platform to showcase the incredible opportunities the industry has to offer, whether they are running the company, designing the next big product, or testing innovations on the shop floor.

On April 30, the Institute will honor 100 women and 30 Emerging Leaders, a category to honor women under the age of 30 who have achieved unique accomplishments at the start of their careers. Surrounding the Awards Dinner Gala is a professional and leadership development program from April 29 through April 30.
STEP Forward Women’s Initiative Regional Events

STEP Forward regional events give 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. Eighty-eight percent of STEP Ahead alumnae say it has increased their level of engagement in developing others. Seventy-five percent say the STEP Women’s Initiative has increased visibility of opportunities for women.

There are two main types of STEP Forward regional events:

- **STEP Forward full conference events** take place over one to one and a half days and include about six hours of content (training, panels, keynotes) followed by a reception. These events include full promotional efforts, more comprehensive developmental training and gift bags for attendees. This program targets 150–200 senior level (director/VP) attendees with executive-level engagement in the keynotes.

- **STEP Forward lite events** are custom-designed one- to three-hour events, including a women in leadership panel discussion, reception and optional breakout training before or after the event. These events include targeted promotional efforts and gift bags for attendees. This program attracts 50–75 manager-level (manager/director/VP) attendees with executive-level engagement in the keynotes.

These networking events are held with manufacturers to discuss current strategies and develop new concepts for advancing and retaining female talent. It is a chance for women to connect with their peers, learn from each other’s successes and develop a local community focused on diversity.
#MFGWOMEN and STEP AHEAD
Alumae Online Communities

More than 5,000 people have attended a STEP event—90 percent of them were women. Analysis administered by Deloitte indicates the STEP Women’s Initiative has helped raise the visibility of opportunities for women in the industry, manufacturing opportunities in the community and opportunities for women within their companies.

In mid-2018, The Manufacturing Institute introduced the #MFGWomen Community platform to provide participants with an online community to connect, engage and share information and best practices in real time as part of the STEP Women’s Initiative. With more than 5,100 members and growing, the #MFGWomen Community allows you to interact and communicate with your peers, community leaders, educators and more. Here are a few benefits to get you engaged on the #MFGWomen Community site:

- Collaborate with others in discussion groups
- Exchange resources and best practices
- Discuss critical industry issues and receive input from those outside your organization
- Network with other industry experts
- Foster a sense of company and regional community

The benefits are endless and will deepen as more individuals engage and join in discussions.
BEST PRACTICE SHARING

The Manufacturing Institute is dedicated to providing manufacturers with best practice solutions for their workforce challenges. The Institute documents best practices on how manufacturers are attracting and retaining a quality workforce and highlights these best practice spotlights on a national level through social media and digital outlets, press promotion and Institute programs, such as the STEP Ahead Women’s Initiative and National Manufacturing Day.

Associations or corporate sponsors who wish to be profiled as the face of their respective industry on gender equity have the opportunity to be the official co-presenter of an industry-specific toolkit. This package is industry exclusive, with one “industry toolkit” per sector; yours will be the only industry best practice spotlight for the selected industry.