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AIIST Women in Steel Conference

21-23 SEPTEMBER 2026

Huntington Convention Center
of Cleveland

Cleveland, Ohio, USA



ABOUT THE EVENT

This annual event supports the recruitment, engagement and professional development of women in the global steel industry. Over two-and-a-half days, the event features keynote presentations, panel discussions, leadership development sessions and networking opportunities designed to support professional growth and industry connection. Attendees will gain perspective on industry trends, communication, leadership and career development while connecting with more than 500 professionals across operations, engineering and corporate functions.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

This event is designed for professionals who are looking to grow their impact, strengthen their leadership capabilities and expand their network. It is ideal for individuals who:

- Work in or support manufacturing operations, engineering, technical services or corporate functions.
- Are interested in developing their communication, leadership and influence in the workplace.
- Are navigating career growth, from early career through senior leadership roles.
- Want to better understand how to lead teams, collaborate across functions and contribute to organizational success.
- Value mentorship, professional development, and building a more connected and inclusive workforce.

Both women and men are encouraged to attend and contribute to the continued advancement of the industry.

Schedule of Events

MONDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2026

Noon–5:30 p.m. >> **Registration**

1–5:30 p.m. >> **Professional Development Workshops**

Three optional enrichment sessions will be offered that are tailored to address the diverse needs and aspirations of our attendees. Participants will have the opportunity to select their workshop of interest from the following topics (2 sessions maximum per registrant):

1–3 p.m. >> **Session 1**

Being in the Moment

Being in the Moment is an interactive workshop that teaches the skill at the heart of every strong relationship and effective leader: intentional listening. Drawing on research, humor and improv-based exercises, Judy Ferraro shows how being fully present transforms the way we communicate, connect and collaborate.

Participants explore why our minds wander nearly half the day and how that distraction affects clarity, happiness and trust. The session breaks down the five levels of listening, guiding attendees from “waiting to talk” to truly hearing what’s said, felt and even left unspoken.

Using the “Yes, And” mindset, Ferraro offers practical tools to pause before responding, reflect emotion rather than react and stay curious longer. These simple shifts help people reduce misunderstandings, strengthen relationships and show up as more empathetic, thoughtful communicators.

Being in the Moment is practical, memorable and immediately applicable, equipping professionals to listen with intention, lead with presence and build deeper, more meaningful connections in every conversation. And everyone will make a new friend.

Judy Ferraro, President, Judy Ferraro & Associates Inc.

High-Stakes Communication: Every Time You Speak, It Counts

Do you recognize how high the stakes are when communicating your ideas in front of peers or senior leadership?

Do you project confidence — or hesitation?

Fripp considers every opportunity to speak, a high-stakes communication moment. In this interactive session, participants observe live coaching demonstrations and learn the nuances that separate good speakers from influential leaders.



For more information, visit

AIST.org/WISconference

This session addresses how women can communicate with confidence and credibility while remaining authentic and approachable.

The audience will:

- Recognize that all speaking is public speaking — not just formal presentations.
- Increase opportunity in frequent and unplanned workplace conversations.
- Sound clear, confident and credible in meetings with peers, leaders and stakeholders.
- Apply a proven technique to be perceived as likable, trustworthy and authoritative.
- Speak so ideas are remembered and repeated.
- Use stories to teach, train, inspire, influence, convince and persuade.

Participants will learn how to elevate everyday communication — from meetings and updates to informal conversations — so their ideas are heard, respected and remembered. Attendees discover how posture, movement, vocal variety, structure and word choice all influence how a message is received. These sessions include Fripp's razor-focused mini-coaching format. Willing volunteers receive immediate, practical refinements to what they plan to say in their next important presentation.

Patricia Fripp, *THE Presentation Skills Trainer, Fripp & Associates*

Leading From the Chair You're in NOW

Whether you are in the early stages of your career, already in an executive position or currently in between, you know how important leadership is for your professional success (as well as your organization's). Here's the thing, though: leadership isn't some special ability that only people in the higher ranks can exhibit. Rather, it's something that's accessible to people at all levels within an organization. Just because you aren't in the C-suite or managing people doesn't mean you can't be a leader — far from it, actually!

Without question, leadership skills are critical for high-level roles where you have oversight over people, processes and budgets. But thinking that only vice presidents or people managers can be leaders limits not just your perspective but also your options. It's critical to understand that nowadays, when competition is so intense, leadership is important for everyone — and at any level — for companies to succeed (let alone for anyone who wants to advance their career). The key is to learn how to lead from the chair you're in right now.

Val Grubb, *Keynote Speaker and Leadership Development Accelerator, Val Grubb & Associates Ltd.*

Professional development enrichment sessions are based on availability. Sessions will begin at 1 p.m. EDT and conclude at 5:30 p.m. EDT. Each session will be 2 hours in length, with a 30-minute break between the first and second session.

3–3:30 p.m. >> Afternoon Networking Break and Exhibit Visits

3:30–5:30 p.m. >> Professional Development Workshops: Session 2

Sessions will be the same as above.

5:30–7 p.m. >> Welcome Reception



TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

7 a.m. >> **Registration Opens**

7:30–8:45 a.m. >> **Optional: Wellness Session**

Two optional wellness sessions will be offered to help attendees start their day with focus, relaxation and renewed energy. These complimentary sessions are available on a first-come, first-served basis and provide an opportunity to recharge before the day's programming begins. Participants may select one session during each time slot, space permitting.

Back to Earth Yoga: Light Movement and Sound Bath, Steve Turner

Meditation and Gentle Movement, Sydney Shoff

Each session will be offered twice to accommodate attendee schedules, with time slots from 7:30–8 a.m. and 8:15–8:45 a.m. Time slot selection will open approximately two weeks prior to the conference.



8–9 a.m. >> **Breakfast and Exhibit Visits**

9–9:45 a.m. >> **Welcome and MaryEmily Slate Trailblazer Award Presentation**

Stacy Varnecky, General Manager – Operations, Association for Iron & Steel Technology and **Kelly Dallas**, Senior Director, Engineering, Cleveland-Cliffs Inc.

9:45–10:45 a.m. >> **An Interview With Carolee Vanicek**

Carolee Vanicek, Vice President of Manufacturing, Metallus

10:45–11:15 a.m. >> **Morning Networking Break and Exhibit Visits**



For more information, visit

[AIST.org/WISconference](https://www.aist.org/WISconference)

**11:15 a.m.–12:15 p.m. >> Accelerating Action
– Advocating for Yourself and Leading Forward
Panel Discussion**

Advocating for yourself in the workplace is a critical skill for advancing into and succeeding in leadership roles — particularly within operational environments. This panel brings together accomplished women in management who will share practical strategies for building confidence, communicating value and taking ownership of career growth. Through real-world experiences, panelists will discuss how they have navigated challenges, stepped into leadership, and driven impact within their teams and organizations. Aligned with the theme of Accelerating Action, this session will equip attendees with tangible tools and actionable insights they can apply immediately to lead forward, strengthen their voice and support others along the way.

*Moderator: **Jen Kalin**, Regional Director of Facilities, Osborn Engineering Inc.*

*Panelists: **Nicole Altman**, Process Engineer, Hatch; **Joanna “JoJo” Clark**, Meltshop Manager, Nucor Steel–Hertford County; **Laura Devoni**, Vice President of Human Resources and Corporate Affairs, Algoma Steel Inc.; **Brandy Heath**, Continuous Improvement Operations Excellence Manager, CMC Steel Alabama; **Mindy Toth**, Global Vice President, Human Resources & Marketing, Fives North American Combustion Inc.*



12:15–1:30 p.m. >> Networking Lunch

1–1:30 p.m. >> Exhibit Visits

**1:30–2:30 p.m. >> Influencing Without Authority:
Getting Results When You’re Not the Boss**

In today’s workplace, achieving results often depends on the ability to lead and influence others without formal authority. Whether working across functions, aligning stakeholders or managing upward, professionals must rely on communication, credibility and trust to move initiatives forward. This session introduces a practical framework for influencing without authority, equipping attendees with strategies to build alignment, navigate competing priorities and gain buy-in. Participants will learn how to communicate with purpose, strengthen relationships and confidently drive outcomes, regardless of their position on the organizational chart.

***Val Grubb**, Keynote Speaker and Leadership Development Accelerator, Val Grubb & Associates Ltd.*



2:30–3 p.m. >> Brain Break: She’s Got the Beat Bingo

A high-energy brain break that blends music, nostalgia and a bit of friendly competition. Participants will play bingo while listening to recognizable hits from women artists across the decades. Singing is encouraged! It’s a fun, low-pressure way to reset, reconnect and bring some energy back into the day.

3–3:30 p.m. >> Afternoon Networking Break and Exhibit Visits

3:30–4:30 p.m. >> Steel in Transition: How Trade Policy and Carbon Regulation Are Reshaping Global Markets

Converging carbon border mechanisms, tariff realignments and antidumping actions are actively redirecting steel trade flows — shifting volumes between geographies, creating product-level scarcities and repricing competitive advantage across the supply chain. As green procurement mandates tighten, these pressures compound: some trade corridors are accelerating, others are closing. This keynote examines where those shifts are materializing, what’s driving them and what they mean for market structure.

Mara Kronauer, Principal, Boston Consulting Group

4:30–5:30 p.m. >> Command the Room: Leveraging Every Presentation Into a Career-Building Moment

Every presentation, whether in a team meeting, before senior leadership or among peers, is an opportunity to build credibility, increase visibility and influence outcomes. In technical, management and employee-employer environments, the ability to communicate with clarity and confidence is not optional, it is essential. Yet for many professionals, speaking up in meetings, presenting recommendations or defending conclusions can feel intimidating and high stakes. This keynote will provide practical techniques to help attendees present ideas more effectively, communicate technical information with greater impact and engage decision-makers in meaningful ways. Participants will leave better prepared to command the room, strengthen their executive presence and turn every presentation into a career-building moment.

Patricia Fripp, THE Presentation Skills Trainer, Fripp & Associates

5:30–6:30 p.m. >> Networking Reception



WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

7 a.m. >> Registration Opens

7:30–8:45 a.m. >> Optional: Wellness Session

Two optional wellness sessions will be offered to help attendees start their day with focus, relaxation and renewed energy. These complimentary sessions are available on a first-come, first-served basis and provide an opportunity to recharge before the day's programming begins. Participants may select one session during each time slot, space permitting.

Back to Earth Yoga: Light Movement and Sound Bath, Steve Turner

Meditation and Gentle Movement, Sydney Shoff

Each session will be offered twice to accommodate attendee schedules, with time slots from 7:30–8 a.m. and 8:15–8:45 a.m. Time slot selection will open approximately two weeks prior to the conference.



8–9 a.m. >> Breakfast and Exhibit Visits

9–10:30 a.m. >> From Concept to Completion: Real-World Technical Leadership in Steel Panel Discussion

This panel brings together women from across the steel industry to share the real stories behind their technical work and the impact it delivers. Each panelist will walk through a specific project, highlighting the objectives, technical challenges and outcomes, while providing insight into how decisions were made and problems were solved along the way.

Beyond the technical details, the discussion will explore the realities of working in operational and engineering environments, including navigating complex projects, collaborating across teams, and overcoming challenges in the field. Panelists will also reflect on lessons learned, leadership growth and the perspectives that have shaped their careers.

This session offers attendees a unique opportunity to gain practical insights, hear candid experiences, and better understand how technical expertise and leadership come together to drive results in today's steel industry.

Moderator: Michelle Klein, Director of Project Controls, Stevens Engineers & Constructors



10:30–11 a.m. >> **Morning Networking Break and Exhibit Visits**

11 a.m.–Noon >> **Boomers, X'ers, Millennials and Gen Z: The Multigenerational Workplace: The Road to Understanding and Communication**

Today's workforce brings together four generations, each shaped by distinct experiences, expectations and approaches to communication. Navigating these differences is critical to fostering collaboration, strengthening safety culture and building high-performing teams. This session explores how generational perspectives influence communication styles, mentoring approaches, training effectiveness and employee retention.

Attendees will gain practical strategies to bridge generational gaps, reduce misunderstandings and enhance engagement across teams. With a focus on real-world application, the session will equip participants with tools to improve communication, build trust, and create a more connected and inclusive workplace where all generations can contribute effectively.

Rona Smeak, Associate Professor, Slippery Rock University

Noon–1:15 p.m. >> **Networking Lunch**

1:15–1:30 p.m. >> **Prize Drawings**

1:30–2:30 p.m. >> **Breaking the Mold: Young Women Shaping Steel's Future Panel Discussion**

The early stages of a career are critical in shaping long-term success, confidence and professional direction. This panel brings together early-career women in the steel industry to share candid insights on navigating the transition into new roles, building credibility and establishing strong working relationships across operations, maintenance and leadership teams.

Panelists will discuss the challenges they've faced, how they've developed confidence in demanding environments and the strategies that have helped them gain momentum early in their careers. The session will also highlight the value of professional involvement, including engagement with industry organizations, committees and networking opportunities, in accelerating growth and opening doors.

Moderator: Rachel Schmidt, Technical Sales Manager – EAF Mill Services, Berry Metal Co.



2:30–3 p.m. >> **Afternoon Networking Break and Exhibit Visits**

3–4 p.m. >> **EQ Matters**

EQ Matters is an engaging, interactive, research-backed workshop designed to help professionals strengthen the emotional intelligence skills that drive communication, leadership and long-term success. Led by award-winning writer and speaker Judy Ferraro, this session blends humor, storytelling and practical insight to show why EQ is no longer optional, it's essential.

Participants explore the five core components of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, motivation, empathy and social skills) and learn how these skills influence performance, relationships and workplace culture. Backed by compelling data, the workshop highlights how high-EQ individuals earn more, lead more effectively, and create teams that are more engaged, collaborative and resilient.

The session also examines the role of empathy in early development, global approaches to teaching emotional skills, and the behaviors that build or break trust. Through real-world examples and interactive discussion, attendees learn to recognize low-EQ patterns, strengthen their own emotional awareness, and apply EQ strategies to navigate conflict, communicate thoughtfully and lead with authenticity.

No matter your role, EQ Matters offers practical tools and eye-opening insights that create both personal and professional effectiveness.

Judy Ferraro, President, Judy Ferraro & Associates Inc.

4–4:15 p.m. >> **Closing Remarks and Adjournment**

**Times subject to change*

Event Contributors



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HOURS

This program may qualify for up to 13 Professional Development Hour (PDH) credits. Upon completion, attendees may request a certificate outlining the PDH credits earned. Please note, it is the responsibility of the attendee to verify with their certifying body whether these courses meet their requirements.

HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

Room blocks have been reserved at official conference hotels within walking distance of the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland. To view hotel options, discounted rates and reserve a room, visit the conference website hotel page. Please reserve rooms by 30 August to secure AIST discounted rates.

REGISTRATION FEES

Advance registration by 10 August 2026: Member US\$650, Non-member US\$850. Registration fee after 10 August 2026: Member US\$750, Non-member US\$950. Registration includes receptions on Monday and Tuesday, and breakfast, lunch and networking breaks on Tuesday and Wednesday. Professional Development Workshop sessions are available for an additional fee and can be purchased with event registration.

STUDENT RATE

The AIST Foundation is pleased to provide assistance to students interested in attending the AIST Women in Steel Conference. Program details are available online at AIST.org/StudentFunding or by contacting Kaliana Villa at kvilla@aist.org, +1.724.814.3042.

COMPANY DISCOUNT

Groups of three or more individuals from the same facility attending one seminar will receive a discount per person. Not applicable with any other discounts. Please see discount levels below:

- 3+ attendees will receive a 10% discount per person
- 5+ attendees will receive a 15% discount per person
- 15+ attendees will receive a 20% discount per person
- 20+ attendees will receive a 25% discount per person

SPONSORSHIPS AND EXHIBITS

Sponsorships are available that will provide a unique opportunity to showcase your company's commitment to supporting diversity and innovation while gaining valuable visibility among leaders in the industry.

Additionally, a limited number of tabletop exhibits are available for US\$1,500. Sponsorships and tabletop exhibits can be purchased during registration. If you have questions, or would like further information, please contact Nicole McBride at nmcbride@aist.org, +1.724.814.3013.

