MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP AWARD CATEGORIES 2026

PROJECT CATEGORIES

Artificial Intelligence Vision and Strategy: Finalists in this category have developed operational and/or corporate strategies for the use of AI to advance business goals such as greater efficiency, speed, agility, and new product/service discovery. They have developed and communicated a future-focused vision for AI and have orchestrated AI strategy across the organization to achieve consistency and impact.

Business Model Transformation: This category recognizes achievement in using advanced technologies for strategic business model innovation such as discovering new products, creating service-based revenue opportunities, and deploying new business operating models and systems. Successful projects demonstrate leadership and business culture shifts, internal and external collaboration, metrics to measure success, and the ability to leverage core manufacturing strengths to maximize competitiveness. They also exhibit manufacturing readiness and supply chain alignment to rapidly leverage new opportunities.

Collaborative Ecosystems: This category recognizes organizational efforts at utilizing M4.0 technologies to enhance internal and external cross-functional collaboration to boost productivity, satisfy customer requirements, accelerate innovation, achieve greater speed and agility, or build strategies to further growth. Manufacturing organizations recognized with this award create corporate structures and policies that support a collaborative enterprise both internally and with partners, vendors, customers and other external entities.

Digital Supply Chains: This category honors those who have created digitally powered supply networks that are flexible, responsive, and resilient. Finalists in this category have developed strategies for predicting and minimizing disruptions, while also rethinking and reengineering how they source materials, manage suppliers, deliver products, and service customers. They demonstrate efficiency in managing the overall value chain and maximizing customer value. They have also developed or embraced best practices for sharing data across key suppliers, partners, and customers.

Engineering and Production Processes: This category recognizes outstanding achievement in faster and more flexible product design and game-changing process improvements, including the embrace of agile, model-based engineering and advanced technologies such as AI, automation, advanced robotics, and 3D printing. Successful projects improve efficiency and quality, increase responsiveness, bring new products to market faster, and reduce costs.

Enterprise Integration and Technology: Finalists in this category orchestrate innovative corporate IT, OT, engineering, and communications strategies and systems to integrate the shop floor to the top floor. Successful projects demonstrate a holistic approach to technology deployment to create common operating systems, platforms, and data sharing strategies to help establish an integrated enterprise.

Operational Excellence: Finalists in this category implement continuous improvement projects and harness M4.0 technologies and processes to reduce costs, streamline processes, reduce waste, improve quality, and enhance overall equipment effectiveness. Top-scoring projects demonstrate commitment over time, measurable results, and enhanced performance of the organization as a whole.

Sustainability and the Circular Economy: Finalists in this category have made significant progress in embracing manufacturing processes, supported by digital technologies, that minimize emissions, conserve energy, reduce waste, and are economically and environmentally safe and sound for employees, communities, and consumers. They undertake ambitious sustainability initiatives, seek innovative methods for product and materials reclamation, and show a broad and deep commitment to sustainability through product design and end-of-life strategies, meaningful metrics, and/or sustainable practices both internally and across supply networks. And they have demonstrated a commitment to help drive a more circular industrial economy.

Transformational Business Cultures: This category honors organizations that have reimagined traditional manufacturing organizational cultures to create a digital-first mentality in how they think, plan and act in managing operations. They create cultures that foster a continuous learning environment to leverage the potential of advanced technologies to improve the organization. Finalists in this category encourage decisions at the lowest level possible, demonstrate excellence in employee upskilling and reskilling, and cultivate a mindset of flexibility and ownership among the workforce.

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORIES

Digital Transformation Leadership: Individual finalists in this category demonstrate excellence in their commitment to digital technology leadership to drive transformational change in their companies. Successful candidates transform their companies by helping to lead changes in culture, in how data is leveraged to improve decision-making, in how work is organized, and in how people are inspired to achieve excellence. They rise to become

role models for other individuals and companies in the industry. They are experienced professionals at diverse levels of leadership within their organizations.

Next-Generation Leadership: This category honors remarkable manufacturing professionals who have less than 10 years of manufacturing operations career experience as of December 31, 2025. Finalists embody the leadership qualities required in the Manufacturing 4.0 era. They pioneer and execute winning strategies, inspire and manage high-performing teams, and raise awareness of the positive impacts of manufacturing on society.