

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision” Helen Keller

About Paola Velasquez:

My family has a long tradition in manufacturing. My parents worked and retired from the industry, so I learned of the value of manufacturing at a young age. I joined the manufacturing workforce at the beginning of my college years and later went on to gain experience in academia, business, and healthcare. Because of this, I bring a different perspective to the manufacturing industry.

My career has been marked by my passion for leading diversity and inclusion training. For over 20 years, I worked with the underserved and underrepresented population, and have created and led sustainable programs. I've facilitated trainings like Unconscious Bias, Becoming an Ally, Understanding our Privileges, Brave, Bold Conversations, and Value Exercises – all aimed at addressing the skills gap and raising multicultural awareness. Now, I get to do the same for manufacturers and help improve economic equity and inclusion in Illinois manufacturing.

I lead with purpose and understand that diversity, equity, and inclusion need to be embedded into the everyday work and in turn, it will drive meaningful change by cultivating an atmosphere of inclusion and belonging where employees can thrive, and business can grow. By combining my knowledge of critical and emerging issues in the United States with IMEC resources, I help establish actionable goals and objectives to reduce turnover, support workplace collaboration, expand creativity and problem solving, and promote opportunities for career advancement.

As the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at IMEC, I help strengthen Illinois manufacturers and facilitate job opportunities in ways that reduce the industry's equity and skills gap.

Expertise

- DEI Training, Initiatives, and Educational Programs
- Continuous Improvement
- Leadership Development
- Employee Engagement
- Project Management
- Trilingual (English, Spanish, and Portuguese)

Specialized Skills

- Lean Six Sigma Green Belt
- Bridging the Gap Trainer & Trainer of Trainers
- Master of Arts in Spanish Translation
- Bachelor of Arts in Business & Spanish Translation

Results

- Recipient of \$30,000 grant for culturally relevant initiatives, 2019
 - Implemented bilingual marketing & outreach campaign
 - Provided 20+ community outreach events each year & touched over 400 lives
 - Provided education & training in Spanish for 3 consecutive years
- Led Community Health Worker project, 2019-2021
 - Increased the # of resource referrals by 10% each year
 - Saw an 88% reduction in ED utilization of patients
- Led LGBTQ Taskforce, 2016-2021
 - Facilitated education, training & panel discussions
 - Led review of policies & procedures
 - Recognized as an Equality Leader from the Human Rights Campaign for 3 consecutive years
- Led departments through transformational change for employee engagement, increased engagement team from Tier 3 to Tier 1.