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Upward Momentum Names Dr. Kristen Wagner as Executive Director

Wagner joins from the Native CDFI Network to lead the organization through its next chapter as an independent nonprofit

(ST. LOUIS, MO, September 8, 2026) - Upward Momentum is pleased to announce that Dr. Kristen Wagner has joined the organization as its first Executive Director.

Wagner most recently served as National Program Director at the Native CDFI Network (NCN), where she managed NCN's funded programs and membership initiatives and oversaw the design and delivery of capacity-building support for Native community development financial institutions across the country. She recently led NCN's Clean Communities Investment Accelerator, an EPA-funded initiative helping Native CDFIs build clean-energy lending capacity in their communities.

Wagner holds a Ph. D. and master's degree in social work from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of North Dakota. She currently resides in St. Louis.

"Kristen has spent her career building the kind of programs and partnerships that expand real economic opportunities for communities that are too often overlooked. That is exactly the leadership Upward Momentum needs as we grow, and we could not be more excited to have her at the helm." said Ryan Rippel, Founder of Upward Momentum

"I am honored to serve as Upward Momentum's inaugural Executive Director at such a formative moment. Missouri communities hold tremendous knowledge, creativity, and capacity to thrive. We have an opportunity to think boldly about what is possible, invest in promising solutions, and build an organization that is ambitious in its goals and grounded in a deep understanding of the families and communities at the heart of this work." said Dr. Kristen Wagner, Executive Director of Upward Momentum

About Upward Momentum

Upward Momentum is a Missouri-based philanthropic initiative launched to address the root causes of generational poverty and expand economic mobility. Backed by



foundational investments totaling \$30 million from the Clever Little Girl Foundation, the James S. McDonnell Foundation, and Missouri Foundation for Health, the initiative works to create lasting change through three strategic pillars: Caring for Families, Navigating Work, and Strengthening Communities. By investing in community-led solutions, fostering collaboration, and supporting shared learning across rural and urban communities, Upward Momentum seeks to create the conditions that help individuals, families, and communities thrive.

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