

UPSWING

Photo by Deborah Clarke

# Chair Recruitment Pack

The logo for Upswing, featuring the word "UPSWING" in white capital letters on a red rectangular background.

UPSWING

Photo by Dan Martin

Photo: Manuel Harlan

A man in an orange jumpsuit is captured mid-air, performing a circus stunt. He is holding onto a horizontal bar with one hand and has his legs extended. The background is a blue wall with large, colorful, stylized letters. The overall scene is dynamic and artistic.

*"Upswing demonstrates the real possibilities that emerge when circus, dance and theatre meet and meld."*

*The Guardian*

## Join Us as Chair of the Board (initially Co-Chair)

Upswing is a producing and touring contemporary circus company creating visually striking, narrative-led work for audiences across the UK and internationally.

We are seeking a new Chair of the Board to join us at a pivotal moment in our development. This is an opportunity to play a central role in shaping the future of an ambitious company with a growing artistic profile, expanding touring reach, and a strong commitment to meaningful and inclusive storytelling.

As Chair, you will work alongside artists and senior leaders to support bold creative work, guide strategic development, and help steer Upswing through its next phase of growth.

If you are excited by the opportunity to, build audiences, and contribute to the future of contemporary circus, we would love to hear from you.



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Photo courtesy of Creative XR

"Telling a story through contemporary circus is a feat attempted by many, but achieved by regrettably few. Upswing make it look easy."

The Stage

## About Upswing

**Upswing is a leading contemporary circus company, founded in 2006 by Artistic Director Vicki Dela Amedume. An award-winning Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), Upswing is the UK's only female, Black-led contemporary circus charity and a distinctive voice within the sector.**

We are a producing and touring company creating artistically ambitious work that combines physical skill, visual storytelling and compelling narratives. Our productions are designed to reach wide and diverse audiences, touring across the UK and internationally, in both traditional and non-traditional spaces.

Storytelling sits at the heart of our practice. Through movement, skill and imagination, we create work that captivates audiences and sparks connection. Our work reflects a wide range of perspectives, with representation embedded in both what we create and how we make it.

Our work extends beyond performance. We are committed to developing artists, contributing to the future of the artform, and building relationships with communities and partners across the places where we work.



Photo by Celine McKillion

*Bloom*



Photo by Dan Martin

*Showdown*

UPSWING

Photo by Jemima Yong



"For me as a black artist and maker, one of the most pressing problems we have is to see beyond the surface. Circus creates a democratic space to explore the extraordinary qualities that bind not divide us."

*Vicki Dela Amedume, Artistic Director*

## Upswing delivers its mission through four interconnected focus areas:

**Our Company** – A diverse, values-led organisation where creativity, lived experience and responsibility shape our culture.

**Our Work** – Artistically ambitious productions that tour nationally and internationally, reaching audiences from major platforms and venues to communities and non-traditional spaces.

**Our Sector** – A commitment to developing artists and practitioners, particularly those from the Global Majority, through programmes, partnerships and pathways into sustainable careers.

**Our Community** – Creative engagement that builds connection, broadens access and supports long-term relationships with audiences and participants.

**Upswing is a company where artistic excellence and social purpose sit alongside one another, each strengthening the other.**

***Our Board, steered by the Chair play a vital role in holding this balance and supporting the company to thrive.***



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"Upswing is fueled by inspirational, forward thinking artistic vision. We are very fortunate that this incredible artistic work is part of our cultural landscape."

Frank Sweeney, Previous Trustee

## Why This Moment Matters — and Why The Chair Role is Important

As Chair, you would be joining Upswing as it enters a significant new phase of artistic and organisational development.

In recent years, our work has grown in scale, reach and ambition:

- **'Princess and the Pea'** has reached a major international platform, selling out its Broadway run and continuing to tour in the UK and internationally.
- **'SHOWDOWN'**, our most ambitious production to date, ran for four months in Berlin before touring across the UK, expanding our national and international presence.
- At the same time, we are establishing a stronger base in **Staffordshire**, developing new partnerships and building our presence within the region.
- We are also evolving our business model to support touring **sustainability**, deepen our **investment in artists**, and strengthen how we **connect with audiences**.



*Princess and the Pea*



*Showdown*



- Alongside this, we are extending our artistic practice into new contexts, for example through **'Homemade Circus'**, a programme that translates circus techniques into accessible movement, currently being developed in partnership with Parkinson's UK and local healthcare providers in Staffordshire.

This momentum reflects a company in motion, expanding what we make, where we make it, and who it reaches. Our artistic ambition and social purpose continue to grow hand in hand.

To sustain this trajectory, we need a Chair who can support both the creative vision and strategic direction of the organisation, working with the Board and executive team to guide Upswing with clarity, confidence and vision.



Photo by Andrew Billington

*Circus Flavours*



Photo by Jamie Disney

*Homemade Circus*

**If this inspires you, this is an opportunity to contribute to a company shaping the future of contemporary circus, building on our foundations of in place and purpose.**



The logo consists of the word "UPSWING" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, set against a red rectangular background with a slight gradient and a shadow effect.

UPSWING



"Upswing consistently produces artistically bold output with a strong commitment to social purpose. Being a trustee, and carefully ensuring the organisation is always true to itself and delivering work that is distinctive, is an extraordinarily rewarding experience."

Caroline Meaby, Chair of Upswing's Board

## The Role: Co-Chair (Transitioning to Chair)

Upswing is entering an exciting period of growth and transition.

**We are seeking a Chair who will initially join as Co-Chair, working alongside the current Chair before stepping fully into the role in March 2027.**

We have designed this model to allow for a thoughtful and supported transition, providing time to build relationships, share knowledge and develop a strong understanding of the organisation.

During this period, responsibilities will be shared and shaped collaboratively, enabling an effective and confident leadership partnership.

The Co-Chair will play a central role in leading the Board, supporting senior leadership and helping to steward Upswing through its next phase.

This role requires someone able to hold both the artistic vision and strategic direction of the company, while also engaging with the responsibilities of governance. You will support the organisation in balancing creative ambition with sustainability, growth and accountability.



## What the Role Does:

### **Lead effective governance**

Support a Board culture that is focused, inclusive and purposeful, ensuring strong and well-run discussions and decision-making.

### **Partner with senior leadership**

Work closely with the Artistic Director and Executive Director to support strategy, organisational development and artistic ambition.

### **Support the artistic vision**

Help ensure the organisation continues to develop ambitious, high-quality work and reaches audiences at scale.

### **Act as an ambassador**

Represent Upswing externally, building relationships with partners, funders and peers, and helping open new opportunities.

### **Develop the Board**

Support a confident, engaged and inclusive Board, contributing to its ongoing development and effectiveness.





Photo by Mark Robson

## Who we are looking for:

**We are looking for a Chair who brings curiosity, conviction and care, alongside a belief in the value of ambitious artistic work.**

We welcome people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. We are particularly committed to hearing from individuals from the Global Majority and disabled people, neurodivergent people and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Experience can be gained in many ways. You do not need to be a circus expert, but you should have an interest in the arts and a commitment to supporting creative work that connects with audiences.

At this stage in our development, we are particularly keen to hear from people who can help us deepen our presence and relationships in Staffordshire and the wider Midlands. You might bring strong regional and/or national networks, insight and influence through experience in areas such as civic leadership, advocacy and negotiation, regional or place-based development, or the cultural and creative sectors, particularly where this intersects with producing, touring or audience development.

You may currently be, or have been, a senior leader in a public body, cultural organisation, university or mission-led setting.

Above all, we are looking for someone who is excited by the opportunity to help root Upswing more deeply in place while supporting our continued national and international ambitions as a producing and touring company.



Photo by Fotini Christofilopoulou

## You will bring:

- Strategic thinking and the ability to contribute thoughtfully
- Integrity and sound judgement
- Curiosity and openness
- The ability to offer steady guidance and constructive challenge
- Clear and thoughtful communication
- Commitment to championing Upswing's work
- Willingness to understand and ensure high standards of charity governance

### Essential skills and experience

- Knowledge or experience of arts and culture
- Trusteeship or governance experience (or transferable equivalent)
- Experience of leadership and influencing at a senior level
- Commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

### Desirable

- Experience in the performing arts sector
- Connections to the Midlands





Photo by Andrew Billington

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## Time Commitment, Practicalities and Support

The Board meets four times each year, alongside an annual Away Day.

Subcommittees, including Finance, meet as required.

The Chair can expect a commitment of approximately ten to twelve days per year. Meetings are held in a hybrid format, with increasing activity taking place in Staffordshire.

This is a voluntary role, with reasonable expenses reimbursed. All Trustees receive a full induction, including governance support and optional training.

We are committed to accessibility and are happy to discuss any adjustments to support your participation.

## Why Step Into This Role

You will be joining Upswing at a moment of significant creative and organisational growth, with work touring internationally, new projects in development, and a strengthening regional presence.

This is an opportunity to support a company that is:

- Producing and touring ambitious new work
- Reaching audiences nationally and internationally
- Contributing to the future of contemporary circus

As Chair, you will work alongside a committed Board and leadership team, supporting both artistic excellence and organisational sustainability.

You will help shape an organisation that is imaginative, ambitious and forward-looking, while contributing your own experience and perspective to its future.



## How to Express Interest

*If you're interested in applying for the role of Chair but would like an informal and confidential conversation first, please contact Helga Henry to set this up ([helga@helgahenry.com](mailto:helga@helgahenry.com)). Helga is working with Lara Ratnaraja, who are both independent arts consultants, and they are supporting our search for a new Chair. One of them will make an appointment to speak with you.*

**We want to hear from you in a way that feels natural. We assess what you say, not how you present it.**

### You may apply with:

- A written statement
- A video
- An audio message

Please keep submissions to a maximum of two pages or five minutes. Please also include a short CV.

### Tell us:

- Why you are interested in Upswing at this moment
  - What you would bring to the role
  - What you hope to gain and any support you might need
- Send your application to [camille@upswing.org.uk](mailto:camille@upswing.org.uk). We will acknowledge receipt of your application within 2 working days.
- You will also receive an anonymous Equal Opportunities form.

### Recruitment timeline

You may apply at any time up until the application deadline of 5pm on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026.

In person interviews will take place on two consecutive days in the week of October 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> October 2026. These interviews will be held in the West Midlands, most likely Stoke-on Trent.

Post interview formalities, including meeting the wider board, formal checks and references and a formal written offer will take place in the second half of October.

First Board meeting: 2 November 2026