Chair of the Board

Recruitment Pack

Upswing

2026

This document is available in alternative formats on request. Please contact camille@upswing.org.uk

About Upswing

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

We are founded in 2006 by Artistic Director Vicki Dela Amedume. Upswing is an award-winning Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and the UK's only female, Black-led contemporary circus charity.

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.

What We Do

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, plays a vital role in holding this balance and supporting the company to thrive.

Where We Are Now

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 support for artists, and strengthen how we connect with audiences.

Alongside this, we are extending our artistic practice into new contexts. 'Homemade Circus' is 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.

The Role

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 steer 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.

Key Responsibilities

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.

Who We Are Looking For

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

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.

Personal Qualities

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

Commitment and Terms

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 Join Us

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 Apply

If you are 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.

Email: helga@helgahenry.com

Helga is working with Lara Ratnaraja; both are independent arts consultants supporting our search for a new Chair. One of them will make an appointment to speak with you.

Your Application

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

We will acknowledge receipt of your application within two working days. You will also receive an anonymous Equal Opportunities form.

Key Dates

Application deadline

5pm on Friday 25th September 2026

Interviews

Two consecutive days in the week of 12 to 16 October 2026. 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. These will take place in the second half of October.

First Board meeting

2 November 2026