

April 9, 2026

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Springboard for the Arts Announces Executive Director Transition



SAINT PAUL, MN — Springboard for the Arts announced today that Executive Director Laura Zabel will transition out of the Executive Director role in Summer 2026 after 21 years of dynamic leadership.

Through creativity, vision, purpose, and heart, Zabel is a steadfast advocate for artists and their role in building healthy and just communities. With Zabel's creative leadership, Springboard has become a leader across Minnesota, the Upper Midwest, and the U.S., known for supporting artists with the tools to make a living and a life and to use their creative skills to support urgent community issues.

“It has been a joy and honor to lead this remarkable organization through so many chapters of growth and response. In a lot of ways, Springboard and I grew up together.” said Zabel. “Today, Springboard is strong—durable, responsive, and innovative—all of the qualities that make this the right moment for a transition. As for my own next chapter, I’m excited to deepen my focus on the coalition building work we are incubating at Springboard to support locally-rooted ecosystems for creativity and culture across the country. The need for locally-rooted creative organizations, like Springboard, has never been more clear, and I feel a sense of urgency to help support and advocate for this vital work in a new way.”

Since becoming Executive Director in 2005, Zabel has guided Springboard through many periods of significant growth, innovation, and national recognition. Some of the work Laura has led Springboard through includes:

- Growing Springboard’s staff of working artists from 4 to over 30, demonstrating Springboard’s values in staff compensation, benefits and workplace support;
- Developing the Artists Access to Healthcare program during a time when artists in MN were twice as likely to be uninsured as the general population;
- Launching responsive community projects that have positioned artists and culture bearers as essential to local economies, equitable community development, environmental stewardship, and public health;
- Sharing of Springboard’s models and tools with organizations across the country, leading to over 100 replications of Springboard’s work;
- Establishing a rural headquarters in Fergus Falls in 2011, which has become a national home for leadership, solidarity and advocacy for rural arts and community development;
- Distributing more than \$2 million in emergency relief funds for artists during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Leading a capital campaign to transform a vacant used car dealership into Springboard’s vibrant Saint Paul headquarters; and
- Launching a Guaranteed Income for Artists pilot that is now one of the longest-running pilots in the country.
- Building a statewide model for emergency relief for artists through a partnership with Minnesota’s Regional Arts Councils.

“For 21 years, Laura has modeled what visionary, values-driven leadership looks like,” said Sarah Swedburg, President of Springboard’s Board of Directors. “Her work has positioned Springboard as a trusted partner to artists, communities, and institutions nationwide. We’re honored to celebrate all she’s accomplished and to carry forward her belief that artists make our communities stronger, more connected, and more joyful.”

Zabel will wrap up her work as Executive Director at the end of June 2026. She will transition to a new role that will be in collaboration with Springboard and focused on supporting local creative ecosystems across the U.S., through the Creative Change Coalition founded by Springboard in 2023 and other national initiatives.

Springboard enters this transition from a position of organizational health, with strong staff and board leadership, financial stability, and a continued commitment to serving artists and communities in Minnesota and beyond. Springboard's Board of Directors has partnered with 8 Bridges Workshop to guide the executive search and will share updates as the search process unfolds.

About Springboard for the Arts

Springboard for the Arts is a national artist-centered community and economic development organization. Our mission is to support artists with the tools to make a living and a life, and to build just and equitable communities full of meaning, joy, and connection. From our offices in Saint Paul and Fergus Falls, Minnesota, we deliver resources locally and nationally tailored to creative workers and pilot bold ideas rooted in local needs.

Our vision is of a world where artists are essential; local economies are vibrant and just; and the systems that surround us are human-centered. Springboard's work has been featured in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Stanford Social Innovation Review and The Guardian and directly impacts over 27,000 artists each year in our home state of Minnesota. Through national tools and training Springboard's programs have been replicated in over 100 communities across the U.S. and internationally. Learn more about our work at: www.springboardforthearts.org.



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