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Forward Cities Announces Fay Horwitt as Incoming President and CEO

DURHAM, NC — Durham based nonprofit [Forward Cities](https://www.forwardcities.org) is pleased to announce that Fay Horwitt has been named incoming President & Chief Executive Officer of the organization, effective January 1, 2021. Horwitt, currently serving in the capacity of President, will assume the position from outgoing co-founder and CEO Christopher Gergen. Forward Cities partners with communities to create, grow, and sustain more equitable opportunities for every entrepreneur.

Gergen co-founded Forward Cities in 2014, seeking to reimagine how cities and regions allocate resources and support for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs. Over the past six years, Forward Cities has grown to over 20 employees and \$2 million in annual revenue. His rich legacy includes pioneering the organization's relationship with the [Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](https://www.ewingmarionkauffman.org) which led to the seminal and ongoing [ESHIP Communities](https://www.eship.com) program, stewarded by Horwitt. In 2018 Gergen oversaw the merger with nonprofit CEOs for Cities. Under his leadership Forward Cities launched initiatives in over a dozen small and mid-sized cities with a community accelerator program aimed at finding inclusive approaches to economic development. He also spearheaded regional programs in North Carolina and Ohio to create more cohesion, collaboration, and learning across communities. Gergen will continue to pursue his passion of creating more resilient cities with his new, independent advisory firm Forward Impact Solutions.

“As our nation grapples with the fallout from COVID and a long overdue reckoning with centuries of racial injustice, it is incumbent on those of us with privilege to create meaningful change in the power structures that have created this difficult moment,” says Gergen. “Fay has the character, judgment, and expertise to grow the work of Forward Cities, and the field at-large. In Fay’s capable hands, I am confident that the organization will achieve deep impact, pursued with excellence and centering the experiences of the underestimated entrepreneurs and small business owners who we serve. I could not be more excited about the future of Forward Cities. I will be cheering on Fay and the team along the way.”

Horwitt has been serving in the capacity of President of Forward Cities since August 2019 and leads the organization's ESHIP Communities engagement, funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. A dedicated advocate for the emerging profession of ecosystem building, Horwitt is a sought-after presenter, trainer, and thought leader within the field. Her approach is rooted in racial equity, which led her to co-develop Forward Cities anti-racism training; [ABIDE](#) (which stands for Access, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity) specifically and uniquely centers entrepreneurial ecosystems. She has also recently begun addressing an emerging need in local communities through ecosystem healing – a guided process of tackling the deep racial and cultural divides that are at the root of economic injustice through radically authentic conversations and gatherings.

Forward Cities, like the nation, is at a pivotal inflection point, and Horwitt looks forward to recommitting to its mission to expand entrepreneurial opportunities to every member of every community in our country, regardless of race, gender, religion, age, sexual identity, sexual preference, education level, family status, sector, stage, or goals. As she eloquently states in a [recent article](#), “entrepreneurship, at this unprecedented crossroads, is a vehicle with the potential to disrupt our current national stalemate and propel us down the right and righteous road toward the actualization of true equity.”

“I am deeply honored to hold the trust and confidence of the board, staff, funders, partners, and stakeholders as I assume the role of President & CEO at Forward Cities,” says Horwitt. “I am grateful for the opportunity, as a Black woman, particularly in this time, to lead an organization with this mission. I am continually blown away by the resilience of the entrepreneurs and those who support them in each community we are privileged to work with. I look forward to creating more equitable opportunities for every entrepreneur, regardless of who they are. I am grateful for Christopher’s stewardship of our work and look forward to building on our success.”

Forward Cities’ board of directors has expressed confidence in Horwitt’s leadership. They voted unanimously to formally promote her to President & CEO at the December 8 board meeting. Joining Horwitt in stepping up in leadership at Forward Cities, Nicolas Gunkel, formerly the Vice President of Ecosystem Impacts, will assume the role of Senior Vice President, leading organizational finance and partnerships. Gunkel, along with Michelle Benham, Senior Director of Marketing & Operations and Brett Brenton, Senior Director of Learning Networks, make up the newly structured senior leadership team.

Forward Cities’ incoming Board Chair Cathy Belk from the [Deaconess Foundation](#) shares, “The board is thrilled to welcome Fay to the role of President & CEO. We have the utmost confidence in her ability – along with her talented team – to build on the success enjoyed over the past several years and expand the impact on communities and entrepreneurs across the country. I look forward to our Board of Directors supporting her and the team’s creativity, fortitude, and deep knowledge of the field in action. We are also grateful for Christopher’s service to the important work of Forward Cities for the past six years and are excited for the impact he will continue to have in the field of inclusive economic development.”

[Forward Cities](#) is a national nonprofit equipping communities and regions to grow and sustain more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems. For more information, please visit www.forwardcities.org.

