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Sunflower Foundation names Burger senior VP of programs and strategy

Foundation veteran to oversee statewide health philanthropic organization's program work



Sunflower Foundation has named Elizabeth Burger, a longtime program officer who has been integral in helping spearhead the Topeka-based health philanthropy's work across Kansas for nearly 12 years, as its new senior vice president of programs and strategy, effective July 1.

In this role, Burger will manage the necessary infrastructure to achieve the foundation's programmatic vision, providing oversight for proposal development and support for stakeholder engagement and program convenings. She will be instrumental in driving the foundation's culture and approach to grantmaking.

"The foundation's programmatic work is central to our ability to connect with stakeholders and grantees. Elizabeth has been a major contributor to this work for half of the foundation's 24-year history," said Brandon Skidmore, president and CEO of the foundation. "In her nearly 12 years with Sunflower, she has invested considerable time and energy in building relationships and in meeting partners in their own communities to better understand their challenges and to learn from their work."

Most recently, as vice president of Healthy Communities, Burger has been leading the foundation's work in enhancing the built environment and its influences on health and wellness, to include Sunflower's signature trails program and improving access

to the outdoors, in addition to her work in food access, nutrition security and nonprofit capacity building. Her new role will now include overseeing the foundation's program staff in both Healthy Communities and Health Systems.

"I am excited for how the program team will advance our efforts to build partnerships and support communities in their efforts to drive effective and transformational work," Skidmore said.

Burger, PhD, MBA, EMT, is looking forward to having an expanded role in leading the foundation's program work, which includes investments in support of strengthening organizational capacity and implementing innovative strategies in health systems across Kansas, as well as providing collaborative learning opportunities.

"I am ready to embrace my next chapter at Sunflower and the new role I will play in advancing some of our flagship work around trails and access to the outdoors, integrated care and behavioral health, nutrition security, and nonprofit capacity building," Burger said. "I look forward to working with our team around not only grantmaking but also the foundation's commitment to high-quality, collaborative learning that is accessible to everyone, especially our rural partners."

Originally from Bartlesville, Okla., Burger started her career as a broadcast journalist in Tulsa, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Communications/Journalism from the University of Tulsa. She later earned a Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Science in Health and Human Performance from Oklahoma State University, as well as a Master of Business Administration from Rockhurst University.

After transitioning to the healthcare sector, Burger managed hospital-based wellness programs and owned her own personal training business, before coming to Kansas to complete a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Kansas. She spent several years teaching at various universities while also serving as director of evaluation for the American Academy of Family Physicians, where she studied models of care and healthcare systems across the country.

After almost a decade of pursuing grants, in 2012, Burger joined the other side of grantmaking as a program officer for Sunflower Foundation. She started as a part-time contractor, assisting with the foundation's trails work, before joining the staff full-time in 2013 as a program officer. She later became a senior program officer, before being named vice president of Healthy Communities in 2022.

Burger, who lives with her husband, Gregory, in rural Lecompton, volunteers in local projects around youth fitness, land conservation, local food production, and community vitality. She also serves as a volunteer first responder and certified firefighter for Douglas County Consolidated Fire District No. 1.

ABOUT SUNFLOWER FOUNDATION

Sunflower Foundation was established in 2000 as a statewide health philanthropy with a mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the health and well-being of all Kansans. The foundation believes that a thriving, sustainable nonprofit sector contributes to healthy communities, and we are committed to investing in mission-aligned nonprofits through grants, education, advocacy, collaborative learning, and capacity building. To learn more, visit www.SunflowerFoundation.org.
