

SPEAKER INFORMATION

Alaina Harkness

Chief Executive Officer

Current

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Alaina Harkness, chief executive officer of Current, the Chicago-based water innovation hub, is also CEO of the Great Lakes Water Innovation Engine (Great Lakes ReNEW). She leads a team that grows a circular blue economy, accelerates innovation, and solves pressing water challenges.

During her tenure, Current launched the first blue economy blueprint in the Great Lakes region, drawn in more than \$50 million in investments to build the blue economy, launched the first real-time water quality monitoring tool for the Chicago River, and supported the commercialization of dozens of water startups. In January 2024, the National Science Foundation awarded Great Lakes ReNew up to \$160 million for clean water research, tech commercialization, and workforce development.

Previously, she held impactful roles at the John D. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation, Brookings Institution, RW Ventures, and Chicago Community Trust. Harkness has published commentary for the Brookings Institution, Chicago Tribune, New York Times, CityLab, Crain's Chicago Business, and San Francisco Federal Reserve.

Harkness serves on the Illinois Workforce Investment Board and the Illinois Energy Workforce Advisory Council, and as an advisory board member of the Prairie Research Institute. She is a member of the Economic Club of Chicago, a 2022 graduate of the Water Environment Federation's Water Leadership Institute, a Crain's Notable Leader in Sustainability (2024), and a 2014 fellow of Leadership Greater Chicago.