FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Oweesta Names Mel Willie Chief Officer of Strategic Partnerships

LONGMONT, Colo. — Oweesta Corporation announced the appointment of **Mel Willie** as its new **Chief Officer of Strategic Partnerships**, a strategic executive leadership position created to strengthen Oweesta's national partnerships, advocacy efforts, and cross-sector collaborations in support of Native Community Development Financial Institutions (Native CDFIs), Native nonprofits, Tribes, and Native communities.

The appointment reflects Oweesta's continued growth as a national Native CDFI intermediary and its commitment to strengthening the ecosystem of partners, funders, investors, Tribal leaders, and advocates working to expand economic opportunity and support sovereignty across Indian Country.

In his role, Willie will provide executive leadership for strategic partnerships, programmatic collaboration, policy and advocacy initiatives, and national engagement efforts. He will work closely with Native CDFIs, Tribal Nations, philanthropic organizations, federal partners, investors, and peer organizations to advance solutions that strengthen Native economies and expand access to capital and opportunity.

"At a time when Native communities face both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges, strong partnerships and coordinated advocacy have never been more important," said Chrystel Cornelius, President and CEO of Oweesta Corporation. "The creation of this position reflects Oweesta's commitment to growing our impact and deepening our leadership within the Native CDFI movement. Mel brings an extraordinary combination of experience, vision, and relationships that will help us strengthen partnerships, elevate Native voices, and advance the systemic changes needed to support long-term prosperity in Native communities."

A proud member of the Navajo Nation, Willie was born and raised on the reservation in northeast Arizona and brings more than 26 years of experience spanning nonprofit leadership, public affairs, government relations, policy advocacy, affordable housing, philanthropy, and Tribal community development.

Most recently, Willie helped establish and lead a national Native-focused initiative at NeighborWorks America, a congressionally chartered nonprofit organization, where he worked to leverage resources and expand investment opportunities within Native communities across the country.

Willie served as Executive Director of the National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC), where he advanced national Native housing policy and strengthened advocacy efforts on behalf of Tribal housing organizations. Throughout his career, he has successfully represented Tribal interests at the local, state, Tribal, and federal levels and has become a respected voice on issues affecting Native communities nationwide.

Beyond his nonprofit leadership, Willie has played a significant role in advancing Indigenous representation and civic engagement. As principal of Chee Consulting, he advised Tribal, nonprofit, and public-sector leaders on advocacy and public affairs strategies. He also founded 7Gen Leaders, the nation's only Native American SuperPAC, which helped support the historic election of the first two Native American women to the United States Congress in 2018.

"I have always believed that lasting change and impact happens when communities, organizations, and partners align towards a shared vision," said Willie. "Oweesta has a strong reputation as a leader and champion for Native CDFIs and Native communities. I am honored to join this talented and passionate team, and excited to help strengthen partnerships, advance advocacy efforts, and expand opportunities that support tribal economic sovereignty and community prosperity."

Willie currently serves as Treasurer of the Board of Directors for the Housing Assistance Council and as a member of the Board of Directors for the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation. He has served on advisory boards for institutions including Harvard

University and American University and has taught *Native Politics and Grassroots Organizing* at George Washington University.

The appointment comes as Oweesta continues to expand its national leadership role as a backbone organization in advancing capital access, financial inclusion, and Native-led economic development. Through investments, training, technical assistance, advocacy, and strategic partnerships, Oweesta supports Native CDFIs, Native nonprofits, Tribes, and Native communities in building stronger local economies and creating pathways to long-term prosperity.

About Oweesta Corporation

Oweesta Corporation provides opportunities for Native people to develop assets and create wealth by assisting in the establishment of strong, permanent institutions and programs, leading to economic independence and strengthening sovereignty for all Native communities. As the longest-standing Native CDFI intermediary, Oweesta offers financial products and development services exclusively to Native CDFIs and Native communities. These services include training, technical assistance, investments, research, and policy advocacy to help Native communities build an integrated range of asset-building tools.

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