



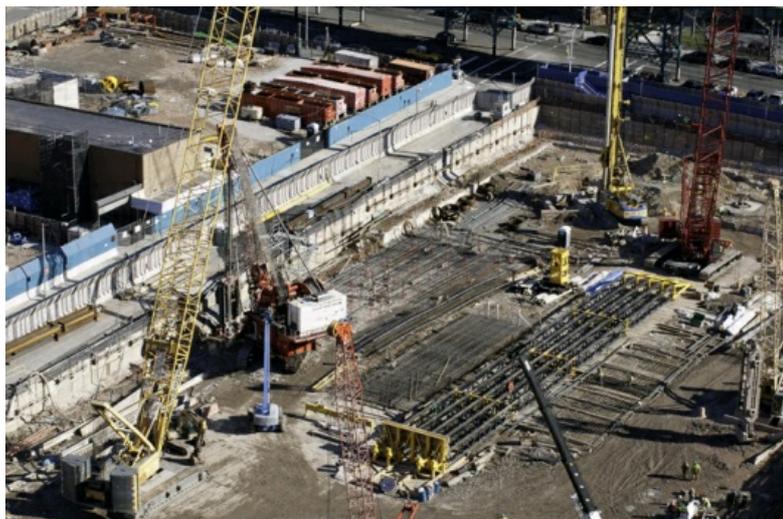
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Group handling West Harlem community benefits money hires executive director

Businessman Kofi Boateng will lead the West Harlem Development Corporation as executive director, the organization announced Monday.

By [Jillian Kumagai](#)
Spectator Senior Staff Writer
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Henry Willson / Senior Staff Photographer

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The [West Harlem Development Corporation](#) has hired an executive director to devise a long-term plan to dole out the \$76 million that Columbia promised Manhattanville.

The WHDC announced on Monday that Kofi Boateng, the founder and chief executive officer of Traders International and the former chief operating officer of the World Trade Center Association, would serve as its executive director. It's a significant logistical step for the development corporation, which has taken heat from politicians and locals for its [delayed start](#) in allocating the money that the University is giving West Harlem in the wake of its campus expansion.

"I'm thrilled to be a part of the [West Harlem Local Development Corporation](#)—an organization that will make a huge difference for the people of Harlem for many years to come," Boateng said in a statement.

"Mr. Boateng's vast experience and proven track record of managing large non-profit organizations will go a long way to secure WHLDC's role in providing services to the West Harlem community," Development Corporation Chair Donald Notice said in a statement.

According to development corporation spokesperson Juanita Scarlett, Boateng will evaluate community projects for funding and come up with a strategy for the implementation of the [Community Benefits Agreement](#), which was finalized in 2009.

Juan Rosa, a member of the development corporation's board, said that Boateng was

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the best-qualified of four candidates for executive director. Rosa said that the board judged candidates based on their experience in leading nonprofits and implementing plans, as well as their knowledge of the CBA.

“Everyone who we interviewed read through it [the Community Benefits Agreement] and skimmed the newspapers about it, but some people just read the newspaper articles,” Rosa said. “He [Boateng] came prepared with a plan for implementation and a plan for his role in one or two years. He knows what he needs to do coming in. He came prepared to carry out his duties.”

Rosa added that the fact that Boateng is trilingual—he speaks English, Spanish, and French—helped him stand out.

“He has more than 15 years of experience in the financial and nonprofit sectors, which will be a tremendous asset to the WHLDC,” Scarlett said.

Columbia officials also welcomed Boateng’s appointment.

“Columbia has been and remains committed to fulfilling its obligations under the CBA so that West Harlem continues to benefit from the University’s long-term investment in our local community,” University spokesperson Victoria Benitez said.

In the CBA, Columbia agreed to set aside \$76 million for housing, education, and job initiatives in Harlem over a 15-year period. As of last month, the WHDC had received \$3.55 million.

Even though the CBA was signed in 2009, the development corporation did not create a website [until December of last year](#), and it did not acquire an office until this month. In December, Community Board 9—which represents West Harlem—passed a resolution setting a March deadline for the group to adopt bylaws and devise a plan to distribute Columbia’s money.

That deadline has passed, but some still saw Boateng’s appointment as progress. Vince Morgan—a candidate for Rep. Charles Rangel’s congressional seat, and an outspoken critic of the development corporation—said that Boateng’s appointment was “a step in the right direction,” although he added that he would like to see more transparency in the organization’s selection of board members.

“From my understanding, they’re growing the board, and I hope that they’ll grow the board with qualified individuals,” Morgan said. “We can’t continue to have the board run by a small group of political insiders.”

Four members of the corporation’s board represent elected officials, including Rosa, who is City Council Member Robert Jackson’s special assistant for Latino and LGBT affairs.

Rosa said that the development corporation has acquired an office space on 127th Street between Amsterdam and Convent avenues, and that it is getting ready to relaunch its website and adopt a mechanism to accept requests for grants.

The next steps for the organization include a process overseen by the state attorney general’s office that will officially register the WHDC, the WHLDC’s successor, as a nonprofit. Once that happens, the WHLDC will be dissolved and the WHDC will take over the task of implementing the CBA.

The two organizations include many, but not all, of the same members.

“We really want to abstain from giving any more grants as the WHLDC, because we really want to show how strong the new board is and that it’s empowered to give grants,” Rosa said. “I am happy with our pace. We could do more public outreach, but that will be done more consistently and systematically with the new executive director.”

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rick131 • 7 months ago

How many millions is his salary?

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anon • 7 months ago

So far this organization has squandered and wasted millions of dollars of Columbia's money. Hopefully community exactly where they are spending the money.

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anon-nemesis → anon • 7 months ago

Anon, what exactly is your major malfunction that you just can't wait to say something obnoxious wasted millions of dollars? Every time you level an accusation of any substance, it turns out to

We don't have to look too far back for your assertion that the workers caused the recent May they'd been told not to cut. That turned out to be something you'd made up.

You ought to get out of the habit of indulging your prejudices by making up this kind of trash. and neither do you.

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