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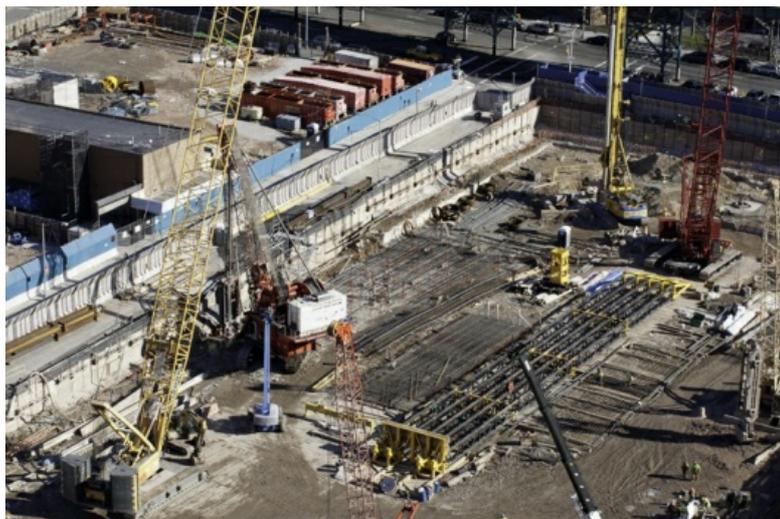
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2011-12 in Review: After criticism, West Harlem Development Corporation gets organized

As of November, the WHDC had distributed only \$300,000 of the \$3.55 million it had received from Columbia as part of the Community Benefits Agreement.

By [Jillian Kumagai](#) and [Finn Vigeland](#)
 Spectator Senior Staff Writer
 Published May 6, 2012



Henry Willson / Senior Staff Photographer

This article is part of a special issue looking back at the 2011-12 academic year. Read the rest of the issue [here](#).

The [West Harlem Development Corporation](#) hired an [executive director](#) in April, after taking heat from local politicians throughout the year for delaying its allocation of the money the University promised to [Manhattanville](#).

Columbia signed the [Community Benefits Agreement](#) in 2009, agreeing to set aside \$76 million for housing, education, and job initiatives in Harlem over a 15-year period. But as of November, the corporation had distributed only \$300,000 of the \$3.55 million it had received from Columbia.

Local politicians and community leaders [publicly called on the WHDC](#) to get moving on its distribution of the funds. Former Congressional candidate and SIPA graduate [Vince Morgan](#) accused the organization of spending \$400,000 on consultants [while remaining "a shell of an organization,"](#) in an open letter to the WHDC on Oct. 24.

The state attorney general's office [launched an inquiry into the organization](#) in November. Later that month, Community Board 9, which represents West Harlem, passed a resolution [setting a three-month deadline](#) for the group to adopt bylaws and devise a plan to distribute Columbia's money.

The WHDC did not create a website [until December of last year](#) and did not acquire an office until April.

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The website includes a mission statement, a list of board members, and a progress report on the organization's recent activities. According to the list, these activities include sponsoring 200 West Harlem children in a city employment program, co-sponsoring policy forums between community leaders and Columbia academic departments, and approving \$3 million for programs at Grant and Manhattanville Houses.

On April 9, the WHDC announced 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.

Boateng will evaluate community projects for funding and come up with a strategy for the implementation of the CBA, development corporation spokesperson Juanita Scarlett said. CB9 also [created a subcommittee](#) in March to outline specific programs in need of financial support by the WHDC.

Scarlett said Boateng's more than 15 years of experience in the financial and nonprofit sectors would be "a tremendous asset" to the WHDC.

Even though Boateng's appointment came after the CB9-imposed deadline, many critics said they were pleased with the progress. Morgan 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.

Juan Rosa, a member of the development corporation's board, said that 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."

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.

"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 director of community 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 successor to the original [West Harlem Local Development Corporation](#), as a nonprofit. Once that happens, the [WHLDC](#) will be dissolved and the WHDC will take over the task of implementing the CBA.

"I am happy with our pace," Rosa said. "We could do more public outreach, but that will be done more consistently and systematically with the new executive director."

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