

Making Financial Lives Better

An Interview with AJ Barkley, Head of Global Community Opportunity, Bank of America

EDITORS' NOTE AJ Barkley is head of Global Community Opportunity for Bank of America. In this role, Barkley is responsible for supporting the company in driving Responsible Growth through global programs that help share success with its communities. This includes leading the company's signature philanthropic programs, Neighborhood Builders®, Student Leaders®, and Driving Impact webinar series, which recognize the significant role empowering community leadership plays in driving economic mobility. To date, more than 4,500 students have participated in the bank's Student Leaders program, and Bank of America has provided capital for nearly 2,000 organizations and access to learning for more than 4,000 nonprofit leaders through Neighborhood Builders. Barkley also leads the bank's National Community Advisory Council, a forum made up of senior leaders from national thought-leadership organizations who provide external perspectives, guidance and feedback on the bank's business policies and practices. Barkley is also responsible for the bank's partnerships with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). Bank of America is the largest investor in CDFIs, with \$2 billion in financing to more than 250 CDFIs across all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Additionally, she leads philanthropic giving for the company, which drives economic mobility focused on the needs



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of communities across the company's global footprint. In 2024, the company provided more than \$290 million in philanthropic investments, including more than \$66 million in support of workforce development and jobs, over \$48 million for community development and affordable housing, \$13 million for small business resiliency, and more than \$55 million for basic needs, including more than \$6 million for natural disaster and humanitarian needs. Barkley is a member of the Executive Leadership Council, and

serves on a variety of nonprofit boards, including the School of Business Board of Visitors for Howard University, the National Urban League, and the Trinity Park Conservancy board in Dallas, Texas. She has also received Inman's 2024 Power Players Award and was named by HousingWire as a Woman of Influence and Vanguard awardee.

COMPANY BRIEF Bank of America (bankofamerica.com) is one of the world's leading financial institutions, serving individual consumers, small and middle-market businesses and large corporations with a full range of banking, investing, asset management and other financial and risk management products and services. The company provides unmatched convenience in the United States, serving nearly 70 million consumer and small business clients with approximately 3,600 retail financial centers, approximately

15,000 ATMs (automated teller machines) and award-winning digital banking with approximately 59 million verified digital users. Bank of America is a global leader in wealth management, corporate and investment banking and trading across a broad range of asset classes, serving corporations, governments, institutions and individuals around the world. Bank of America offers industry-leading support to approximately four million small business households through a suite of innovative, easy-to-use online products and services. The company serves clients through operations across the United States, its territories and more than 35 countries.

Will you highlight your career journey?

I joined Bank of America in 1996, and throughout my career, I held senior leadership roles in Retail Sales, Merrill Wealth Management, and was the head of Community Banking and Lending. In this particular role, I spearheaded the launch of Bank of America's \$15 billion Community Homeownership Commitment, a program aimed to help first time homebuyers and low to moderate income borrowers purchase a home. This work reinforced the importance of creating and advancing economic opportunity in local communities across the globe, which led me to my current role as Head of Global Community Opportunity. Throughout my journey, I've always looked for ways to share my success with others and this role truly embodies our company's commitment to doing so in all the communities where we live and serve.

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How do you define Bank of America’s culture?

At Bank of America, everything we do begins by asking: “What would you like the power to do?” That question drives our purpose – to make financial lives better – and guides how we show up for people every day. Our culture is built on Responsible Growth, which means growing in a sustainable way by focusing on what matters most: helping our clients achieve their goals, creating an environment where teammates can thrive, and investing in communities to expand opportunity. It’s about using our scale and resources to make a positive difference in people’s lives, wherever we live and work.

What do you feel have been the keys to Bank of America’s industry leadership?

Our industry leadership starts with our culture. That foundation allows us to innovate with purpose, whether it’s delivering new digital capabilities for clients or creating programs that help teammates develop and thrive. We invest in technology and ideas that make banking simpler and more secure, while fostering an inclusive workplace where people feel valued and empowered. By combining innovation with a strong culture and a commitment to being a great place to work, we’re able to deliver for clients and communities and lead the industry forward.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

As Head of Global Community Opportunity, I drive Responsible Growth through global programs

that help our communities. This includes leading our company’s philanthropic giving and signature philanthropic programs, including Neighborhood Builders®. This program embodies one of the nation’s largest philanthropic investments in nonprofit leadership development, where we have invested more than \$346 million in communities across the U.S. and trained more than 4,000 leaders at nearly 2,000 U.S. nonprofits. My team is also responsible for our Student Leaders® program, which recognizes approximately 300 community-focused students in nearly 100 markets across the U.S. every year. Through this program, we have engaged more than 4,500 students and invested \$42 million in over 500 local nonprofits. I am also responsible for the bank’s partnerships with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI), among other responsibilities. Bank of America is the nation’s largest private CDFI investor, with \$2 billion in loans, deposits, capital grants and equity investments across more than 250 CDFI partners.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women in leadership roles in the industry?

I believe there are incredible opportunities for women in leadership roles in our industry, and I’ve seen those opportunities come to life throughout my career. At Bank of America, women lead at every level – from our global workforce to key lines of business. Leaders like Chief People Officer Sheri Bronstein; Holly O’Neil, President of Consumer, Retail and Preferred; Sharon Miller, President of Business Banking; Wendy Stewart,

President of Global Commercial Banking; Lindsay Hans, President and Co-Head of Merrill Wealth Management; and Katy Knox, President of Bank of America Private Bank, are just a few examples of women shaping the future of financial services. Their leadership demonstrates that when companies prioritize talent and opportunity, women thrive and drive meaningful impact. I’m proud to work for a company that invests in developing its leaders and creates pathways for growth across the organization and the industry.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Influence with impact – communicate and collaborate. Ask questions, listen, stay curious, and never stop learning – because growth happens when you push beyond your comfort zone. Build strong relationships and a network of mentors and advocates who will challenge and support you along the way. When getting feedback from leaders, mentors, or anyone, you must listen and learn from them, but you must also turn those words into actions and apply them to your daily life. I always take the feedback to heart and make sure to take the time to reflect so I can be the best version of myself. Embrace teamwork because the best ideas come from collaboration. And always look for ways to give back – share your knowledge, lift others up, and make a positive impact in your community. Success isn’t just about what you achieve; it’s about the difference you make for others and the legacy you create. ●

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