

## 2012-13 in review: As Manhattanville benefits are dispensed, questions arise over hiring policies



David Brann / Senior Staff Photographer

WATCH YOUR HEAD | The steel frame of the Jerome L. Green Science Center is now rising above construction fencing.



BY [CASEY TOLAN](#) / Spectator Senior Staff Writer  
May 13, 12:00am

*This article is part of a special issue looking back at the 2012-13 academic year. Read the rest of the issue [here](#).*

As construction progressed on the Manhattanville campus expansion this year, the West Harlem community finally saw the first of the benefits promised by Columbia. But new [questions emerged about the University's record on minority hiring](#).

The steel foundation of the Jerome L. Green Science Center now rises above construction fencing at Broadway and 125th Street, and the building is on track to be completed by 2016. The Lenfest Center for the Arts is also on track for 2016, with the so-called Forum, the conference center, to follow.

Other buildings are in the works as well, including the Business School's new facility, which was bolstered by a \$100 million gift from financier Ronald O. Perelman earlier this month.

Demolition work is continuing elsewhere on the site, with one former Tuck-it-Away storage building being demolished last week.

Meanwhile, the benefits promised by Columbia to the surrounding neighborhoods in the 2009 Community Benefits Agreement are finally starting to be doled out. After getting slammed for inefficiency and mismanagement last year, the West Harlem Local Development Corporation—the agency tasked with distributing a total of \$76 million of Columbia's money—[rebounded this year](#).

In December, an investigation by State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman found that the organization was not guilty of theft, fraud, or other misappropriation of charitable funds. Rather, Schneiderman said in a statement, the group had been “hindered by the board of directors' failure to develop clear policies and procedures for grant-making activities.”

[Those grant-making activities soon progressed](#), with the development corporation starting its first round of grants, which totaled \$2 million, in January. It announced in March that it would split the money between 83 neighborhood organizations.

The grants, which are expected to reach almost 12,000 people in West Harlem, fund local programs ranging from workforce training to gymnastics to opera, and represented the largest expenditures to date of the WHLDC.



LUKE HENDERSON/ SENIOR STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kofi Boateng, WHLDC executive director

“It’s a wonderful, wonderful feeling to know, after many years on this board, that we’ve finally reached the day where we’re going to see the funds allocated in the community,” Kofi Boateng, the executive director of the development corporation, said.

Those in attendance at the March grant ceremony said they thought the organization had overcome its challenges, and were happy to see the first of the long-awaited grants being dispensed.

“They were all complaining. Now it’s quiet,” Boateng said of his organization’s critics. “They’ve seen action. They’ve seen responses.”

A second round of grants will open in June, with awards to be distributed in September.

Still, new questions emerged this semester about whether Columbia was keeping the promises it made in the CBA regarding the hiring of minority-, women-, and locally owned businesses and minority, women, and local workers.

The CBA states that Columbia’s goal for MWL firms is 35 percent of contracting dollars and 40 percent of trade hours.

In February, the Empire State Development Corporation, the state’s chief economic development agency, announced that it would review whether Columbia was meeting those goals.

Administrators say it is. According to statistics released later that month by Joseph Ienuso, executive vice president of facilities, 51 percent of non-specialty contracting dollars have been spent on MWL firms and 67 percent of trade hours have been completed by MWL workers.

The numbers Ienuso released, however, cover only a fraction of the jobs on the site. They exclude projects such as construction of the slurry wall and the central energy plant—work, Ienuso said, that requires specialty contractors. The non-specialty statistics, which measure hiring from when construction began in 2009 until the end of the last fiscal year in June 2012, exclude “a big bulk of the work,” he said.

“For these specialty construction services, there are not many, if any, minority or local firms that do that work,” Ienuso said. “So we carved out the specialty construction from those percentage goals” detailed in the CBA, he said.

Local critics were not convinced. Community Board 9 unanimously passed a resolution [calling for a state audit of Columbia's promises](#) to the West Harlem community in March, with board members questioning the "speciality construction" numbers.

"Columbia is in breach of this agreement," CB9 member Larry English, a former board chair, said. "We are demanding that the state of New York and the city of New York enforce the contracts."

"This 51 percent looks good, except that big juicy part of the money, and that's what's missing here," CB9 member Arnold Boatner said.

The minority hiring statistics also have a political impact, with City Council candidate Vince Morgan, SIPA '06, a longtime Manhattanville critic, shaping his campaign around the controversy.

"Nobody begrudges expansion, but we want to make sure we do it in the right way," Morgan, whose letter to state officials helped spark the ESDC investigation, said. "While I support what they're trying to do in the bigger sense, I want to make sure that we continue to grow, and we live up to the commitments that we make."

*Avantika Kumar, Chris Meyer, Thea Raymond-Sidel, and Christian Zhang contributed reporting.*

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