

Finding the Financial Health Pulse® of American Consumers

November 14, 2023

Speaker Bios

Kara Wilkins (Moderator), Asset Funders Network
Bank On Arkansas+ Director

Kara Wilkins serves as the Director of Bank On Arkansas+ for Asset Funders Network (AFN). In her role, Kara guides the efforts of Bank On Arkansas+ where she engages financial institutions to design accounts that meet Bank On National Standards; secures commitments from stakeholders willing to conduct outreach efforts and offer asset-building services in partnership with Bank On Arkansas+; and coordinates all communications and marketing efforts.

Kara has over a decade of experience working with diverse communities to create innovative solutions to improve health and human equity. Before AFN, Kara worked at the Delta Dental of Arkansas Foundation, Habitat for Humanity of the Chesapeake and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, where she honed her skills in communications, outreach, public policy, development, and advocacy/government relations. Kara is a solutions-focused communications and community engagement strategist, with an extensive background in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

Kara holds a degree in History/Africana Studies from Hendrix College. She resides in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Kennan Cepa, Financial Health Network
Senior Manager, Policy and Research

Kennan blends her experience in research and project management to support our Financial Health Pulse® initiative. As Senior Policy and Research Manager, Kennan conducts research to gain a deeper understanding of Americans' financial lives. She also engages academic audiences and other stakeholders regarding Pulse research, working toward a more equitable financial system for all.

Kennan brings more than a decade of experience researching how different programs, policies, and institutions can support families' economic security. In her previous role at the University of Michigan's Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, she served as Managing Researcher for Studies of

Postsecondary Student Success. There, she oversaw multiple studies helping community colleges understand the impact of policies and programs designed to offer students from vulnerable populations pathways to work opportunities. Prior to that, Kennan held positions at the American Institutes for Research and the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University.

Kennan's body of published work includes contributions to chapters in the book *Bridging the Gaps: College Pathways to Career Success*, as well as research appearing in *The Journal of Family Issues*, *Contexts*, *Teachers College Record*, and *Research in Higher Education*. She has also presented research at conferences organized by the Population Association of America, the American Sociological Association, and the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, among others.

Kennan holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and a Master of Arts in Statistics from the University of Pennsylvania, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Chicago.

Wanjira Chege, Financial Health Network
Associate, Policy and Research

As a Data Associate on the Policy and Research team, Wanjira supports data-driven research, policy, and consulting projects for the Financial Health Network. She's proud to contribute her analytical skills to the organization's relentless effort to advance financial health for all, especially those in historically marginalized groups.

In her role, Wanjira supports research projects and policies that improve consumer financial health, providing high-quality analysis and supporting the data needs of other teams. Prior to joining Financial Health Network, Wanjira served as a data analyst at Azusa Pacific University, spearheading data collection and preparing internal reports for the Center for Community and Engaged Learning. Before that, she was a researcher at nongovernmental organization Kiwimbi Kenya, where she conducted research and data analytics.

Wanjira holds her master's degree in applied statistics and analytics from Azusa Pacific University, a master's degree in finance from the Kenya College of Accounting, and a bachelor's degree in actuarial science from the University of Nairobi. She is a member of the American Statistical Association and the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries.

Jo Christine Miles, Principal Financial Group
Principal Foundation and Principal Community Relations

Jo Christine Miles currently leads corporate and nonprofit philanthropic initiatives as director of Principal® Community Relations and the Principal Financial Group Foundation, Inc. (Principal® Foundation).

In this role, Miles oversees the breadth of efforts at Principal® and Principal Foundation to strengthen communities around the world through grantmaking, employee and match giving, volunteerism, research, and sponsorships.

After a successful career in law, Miles served as public policy fellow for Philanthropy New York, where her work focused on equitable and inclusive philanthropy, gender equity, health, and international grantmaking. Her extensive work with private foundations includes service with the Rockefeller Philanthropic Advisors, the New York State Health Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the New York Women's Foundation, and the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts.

Kristen Scheyder, Citi Foundation
Senior Program Officer

Kristen Scheyder leads the Citi Foundation's Financial Inclusion and Community Solutions portfolios, where she helps cities and nonprofits implement systems-change strategies to spur more inclusive economic opportunity in under-served and under-resourced communities, while also focusing on organizational capacity building to help partners to drive better outcomes for their clients.

Kristen has been a community development practitioner for 25+ years, with experience in the banking, government and nonprofit sectors. Prior to joining Citi in 2012, she was Deputy Director for the Northeast Region of NeighborWorks America, where she oversaw the provision of financial and technical resources to housing organizations in 11 states. Prior to that she held a variety of community development finance positions at HSBC Bank, Seedco (now TruFund Financial Services), the City of Philadelphia; and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

She earned a Masters in Government Administration from the Fels Center of Government at the University of Pennsylvania and is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College.