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## **UNITED WAY OF NORTHEAST LOUISIANA AWARDED FELLOWSHIP TO EXPAND NORTHEAST LOUISIANA BANKING ACCESS**

*Full-Time Bank On Fellow Will Lead Coalition of Government Leaders, Community Organizations, and Financial Institutions in Northeast Louisiana to Bank the Unbanked*

**November 15, 2023** – Millions of Americans across the country are outside of the stabilizing financial mainstream, without a safe banking account to manage their money and build towards a stronger financial future. Across the country, Bank On coalitions work to connect residents to safe, affordable accounts – and Bank On of Northeast Louisiana just received a new grant to supercharge these efforts. United Way of Northeast Louisiana and national nonprofit the [Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund](#) (CFE Fund) announced Raya Boyte-Starnes as Northeast Louisiana’s Bank On Fellow for a two-year term to advance banking access efforts at scale, including through identifying opportunities to connect access to safe accounts to programs and payments. Northeast Louisiana is one of six Bank On coalitions across the country whose work will be supported by this cohort of the Bank On Fellows initiative. The goal of the national Bank On movement is to ensure that everyone has access to safe and affordable financial products and services.

Now in its fourth Wells Fargo Foundation-supported cohort, the national Bank On Fellowship Program provides funding to six Bank On coalitions to support a full-time staff position for two years – a “Fellow” – to lead coalition activities. The six Bank On coalitions include Bank On Arizona, Bank On Inland SoCal, Bank On Cleveland, Kentucky Bank On Network, Bank On Northeast Louisiana, and Bank On New Mexico. Launched in 2017 with generous support from the Wells Fargo Foundation, the Bank On Fellowship Program is the first national initiative focused on building experienced banking access leaders across the country, equipping them with the training, tools, and resources to make significant advancements in local banking access efforts while at the same time generating best practices for other coalitions. Dedicated local leadership is critical to moving beyond general education and literacy efforts and instead into identifying systemic integration points – from unemployment insurance to tax refunds to other program and payment streams – to connect unbanked people to safe, affordable accounts at scale.

United Way of Northeast Louisiana is focused on helping people and improving communities. The organization relies on experienced volunteers, loyal donors, effective partner agencies, and dedicated staff to help achieve a vision for a better Northeast Louisiana.

The organization envisions a community where all individuals and families achieve their human potential through education, income stability, and healthy lives.



“United Way of Northeast Louisiana is committed to empowering individuals and families towards financial stability, because we believe that when people have the tools and resources they need, they can build a brighter future for themselves and their communities,” said Janet S. Durden, President of United Way of Northeast Louisiana.

Kim Lowery, Vice President of Community and Organizational Strategy, emphasizes the tangible impact witnessed in the lives of individuals and families across Northeast Louisiana as a result of recent efforts. “This is why we wholeheartedly support the transformative work carried out by our Bank On of Northeast Louisiana coalition.”

The CFE Fund leads the [national Bank On movement](#), supporting local coalitions working to connect individuals and families to the financial mainstream through partnerships between local governments, financial institutions, and community organizations. The [Bank On National Account Standards](#) define characteristics of a safe, affordable, and fully functional consumer account; accounts certified as meeting Bank On Standards are available at over 400 banks and credit unions across the country in over 46,000 branches, comprising 60% of the U.S. deposit market share.

“Banking access is foundational to financial stability,” said Jonathan Mintz, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund. “A safe, affordable, mainstream account is critical to helping people manage their money and improve their financial health. Bank On coalitions across the country connect people to safe accounts at scale, and a dedicated coalition leader will only supercharge this work. We are proud to partner with the Wells Fargo Foundation to support Bank On of Northeast Louisiana and their new full-time Fellow Raya Boyte-Starnes in helping Northeast Louisiana residents connect to safe financial products.”

Bank On of Northeast Louisiana is a coalition of local partnerships between financial institutions, community organizations and city/state/federal government agencies that work to improve the financial stability of the unbanked and underbanked residents of our communities.

The objective of Bank On NELA is to improve financial stability by connecting residents to safe and affordable mainstream accounts in banks and credit unions, raising public awareness of these efforts and opportunities, and expanding access to financial education and other financial empowerment opportunities.

Housed at United Way of Northeast Louisiana’s Financial Health Center in Monroe, Bank On NELA’s goal is to ensure that everyone has access to safe and affordable financial products and services. BankOn NELA is dedicated to helping improve the financial stability of the unbanked and underbanked residents of our community by:

1. Connecting the unbanked and underbanked to safe and affordable accounts with banks and credit unions
2. Raising public awareness of these efforts and opportunities



3. Expanding access to financial education and other financial empowerment opportunities
4. Working together to minimize barriers to banking access
5. Sharing best practices and opportunities to learn from each other on how to best serve Northeast Louisiana

Raya Boyte-Starnes, Bank On NELA's Fellow, serves as the Community Impact Associate at United Way of Northeast Louisiana. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the College of Business and Social Sciences at the University of Louisiana Monroe. Boyte-Starnes is an Accredited Financial Counselor (AFC), Association for Financial Counseling & Planning Education (AFPCE).

Boyte-Starnes says, "We are truly honored to join Bank On's esteemed 4th Fellowship Cohort. Witnessing the rapid growth of Bank On NELA in just a year has been nothing short of inspiring. Our participation in this cohort represents a pivotal opportunity to further advance banking accessibility, provide valuable financial education to our community, and effect enduring, positive transformation in Northeast Louisiana."

"We're excited to support the continuation of our partnership with CFE Fund and welcome our fourth cohort of Bank On Fellows to lead banking inclusion efforts in markets with high concentrations of unbanked households," said Bonnie Wallace, head of Financial Health Philanthropy at Wells Fargo.

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**About the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE Fund)**

*The CFE Fund supports municipal efforts to improve the financial stability of households by leveraging opportunities unique to local government. By translating cutting-edge experience with large scale programs, research, and policy in cities of all sizes, the CFE Fund assists mayors and other local leaders to identify, develop, fund, implement, and research pilots and programs that help families build assets and make the most of their financial resources. The CFE Fund is currently working in over 100 cities and counties representing 75 million people and has disbursed over \$64 million to city governments and their partners to support these efforts. For more information, please visit [www.cfefund.org](http://www.cfefund.org) or follow us on Twitter at [@CFEFund](https://twitter.com/CFEFund).*

**United Way of Northeast Louisiana** works with volunteers, donors, and other organizations locally to create lasting community change in the areas of Education, Income, and Health. For more information about United Way of Northeast Louisiana, visit [unitedwaynela.org](http://unitedwaynela.org), dial 211 on any landline or mobile phone, a free call 24/7, or text your zip code to 898-211 (Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.).