

# Bank of America and Vital Voices Empower Women to Reach Their Full Economic Potential Across Southeast Asia

## Release Date:

Tuesday, May 7, 2013 9:00 am EDT

## Terms:

Corporate Philanthropy

## Dateline City:

SINGAPORE

## *Global Ambassadors Program Will Focus on Leading Women From Poverty to Prosperity to Prominence*

Bank of America and Vital Voices have convened a mentoring forum in Singapore, which brings together several influential women from the public and private sector who are committed to strengthening women's economic empowerment across developing nations in Southeast Asia. The Global Ambassadors Program, a Vital Voices and Bank of America partnership, mobilizes accomplished professionals as mentors for emerging women leaders in developing countries and brings leaders from the private and public sector together to share and discuss the skills and resources necessary to help women achieve their full economic potential.

The United Nations estimates that the Asia Pacific economy would grow by an additional \$89 billion annually if women were able to achieve their full economic potential. There are nearly six million women-owned businesses in East Asia, with an increasing rate of women entrepreneurs in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Despite this trend, challenges hinder the progress of working women across the region. Social norms often lead women to exit the workforce after marriage or motherhood, and the macroeconomic, institutional, and legal structures of many countries often result in more women living and remaining in poverty. The Global Ambassadors Program will address the barriers women face to enter and advance in the workforce, and explore opportunities to help companies support the rise of women to senior levels of management and enhance government initiatives supporting entrepreneurship.

The week-long forum, taking place May 6 to 10, brings together seven Global Ambassadors (mentors) and seven mentees, representing a diverse set of industries and countries in the region to move women's empowerment forward across Southeast Asia. Centered on the theme of "Women in Southeast Asia: From Poverty to Prosperity to Prominence," the forum will include one-on-one mentoring sessions and a public forum at which social and business leaders from the region will discuss the role of women in advancing social and economic growth.

The seven mentors participating in the program are:

- Nancy Brennan, managing director, head of marketing, Global Banking and Markets, Bank of America Merrill Lynch.
- Michelle Garnaut, founder, M. Restaurant Group.
- Kate James, chief communications officer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Virginia Littlejohn, president, CEO and co-founder, Quantum Leaps Inc.
- Susan McPherson, senior vice president/director of global marketing, Fenton Communications.
- Burnet Tucker, senior human resources executive, Bank of America.
- Susan Roos, employment attorney; wife of U.S. Ambassador to Japan.

"We are thrilled to kick off the second year of the Global Ambassadors Program with a mentoring forum in Singapore, in a region in which women have so much potential to drive economic growth," said Candace Browning, head of global research at Bank of America Merrill Lynch and a Global Ambassador. "Connecting women leaders to the expertise and perspective of mentors is one way that we are helping advance women's economic empowerment, creating stronger communities and ultimately strengthening our global economy."

The Singapore mentoring forum is the first Global Ambassadors Program gathering this year. When the program launched in 2012, ambassadors visited Haiti, South Africa and India where they worked with mentees and a growing international network to create platforms that enable emerging women leaders to achieve economic, political and social change in their country and globally.

The Global Ambassadors Program is part of Bank of America's and Vital Voices' ongoing commitment to investing in leadership development, a goal guided by the belief that strong leaders are vital to healthy, vibrant communities and help advance economic growth. Over time, mentors help their mentees build critical communications, advocacy and business skills and develop strategies to advance their work. Since the forums in Haiti, South Africa and India, mentees have continued to advance on a path of leadership through government appointments, participation in high-level policy meetings, and planning their own events focused on inspiring future leaders.

“What we’ve seen in recent years is a recognition that women are a leadership force with a measurable impact as drivers of business and economic growth,” said Alyse Nelson, president and CEO, Vital Voices Global Partnership. “We’re proud to partner on this innovative global program to leverage the strengths of the public and private sectors and together build a community of leaders who are committed to strengthening women’s economic empowerment in Southeast Asia.”

The next Global Ambassadors Program mentoring forums are set to take place later this year in Brazil and Turkey.

For more information on the Global Ambassadors Program, visit [www.bankofamerica.com/globalambassadors](http://www.bankofamerica.com/globalambassadors).

#### Bank of America

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#### Vital Voices

Vital Voices Global Partnership is a leading non-governmental organization that identifies, invests in and brings visibility to extraordinary women around the world by unleashing their leadership potential to transform lives and accelerate peace and prosperity in their communities. Founded by former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 1997, the organization trains and mentors women leaders as agents of transformative change in economic development, human rights and political participation. The Vital Voices Global Leadership Network includes more than 14,000 leaders representing 144 countries who have trained and mentored 500,000 additional women and girls in their communities. Visit [www.vitalvoices.org](http://www.vitalvoices.org) to learn more.

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#### **Language:**

English

#### **Contact:**

Reporters May Contact:

T.J. Crawford, Bank of America, 1.646.855.3301

[tj.crawford@bankofamerica.com](mailto:tj.crawford@bankofamerica.com)

APAC contact:

Mark Tsang, Bank of America, +852.2536.3366

[mark.tsang@baml.com](mailto:mark.tsang@baml.com)

#### **Ticker Slug:**

*Ticker:* BAC

*Exchange:* NYSE

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**Source URL:** <http://newsroom.bankofamerica.com/press-release/corporate-philanthropy/bank-america-and-vital-voices-empower-women-reach-their-full-ec>