



Dr. Akilah Watkins

Dr. Akilah Watkins is the president and CEO of Independent Sector, the only national membership organization that brings together a diverse community of changemakers, nonprofits, foundations, and corporate giving programs working to strengthen civil society and ensure all people in the United States thrive. Since joining in 2023, Dr. Watkins has been a key voice on policy and practice in the charitable sector and an advocate for the nation's 1.8 million nonprofits and philanthropies.

Prior to Independent Sector, Dr. Watkins was the president and CEO of the Center for Community Progress, the nation's leading nonprofit dedicated to helping state and local governments turn vacant properties into vibrant places. Her work began at the age of 14 when she led efforts to convert a vacant lot and abandoned home into a community center in Roosevelt, New York. Since then, she has served as an executive leader for nonprofits and community development initiatives with NeighborWorks America, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Dr. Watkins holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and an MA in Sociology from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She also holds two MS degrees in Education and Community Economic Development from Southern New Hampshire University, and a BS in Community and Human Services from the State University of New York, Empire State College. She currently serves on advisory boards with the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University and the Maryland Chapter of CISV International. She is a 2025 Nonprofit Times Power & Influence Top 50 honoree.