

2025 Michael T. Corgan Grant Report - Breah Lyon, Equal Innovation Summer Intern

This summer, I had the opportunity of interning at Equal Innovation, the leading intermediary at the forefront of driving innovation and addressing global challenges through strategic collaborations. Equal Innovation connects startups aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with investors, corporations, philanthropy, and government. They have worked around the world – from the US to India, the Middle East, Europe, Canada, and with the UN worldwide. Most recently, Equal Innovation was an official partner of the G20 World Leaders Summit, COP28 Climate Change Summit, and the Clinton Global Initiative. The organization has also served Heads of state such as the US Presidents Clinton, Obama, and Biden, the leadership of Kuwait, and Prime Minister Modi of India.

My experience working with the NGO further contextualized my view of innovation and the importance of strategic partnerships, grounded in the social context of advancing the global good. During my time as an intern, I served on the business development side of operations, armed with the critical project of sourcing potential partners at the upcoming United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York City this September. My days were spent working across several spreadsheets, crafting and curating lists of UNGA attendees and sideline events, tracking who will be attending (corporations, NGOs, Heads of State, foundations, etc.) and creating vetted lists of top startup-supporting NGOs in New York and DC for outreach. During my time, on top of my regular tasks, I took the leap of pitching and spearheading a project of my own, bridging relationships with Consular partners in Boston with innovation centers (Denmark, Japan, and Canada) to enhance the organization's founder network and foreign governmental connections. I felt encouraged by my director to take ownership of bringing new ideas to the table – an aspect I deeply admired about the experience and how it has shaped my personal growth.

This internship has both enriched and expanded my approach to global policy through the lens of innovation and international development. I learned how innovation involves not only thinking about entrepreneurship, technology, and the value of effective creation, but more importantly about re-thinking systems and the status-quo of our world. Innovation provides hope for transformational change, a better quality of life, and renewed possibility. In this perspective, progress cannot be made unless we are creating the environments we need to see this change, especially through equitable policymaking and coordination through meaningful cross-sector collaboration. I observed that, in order to meet the globally endorsed 2030 deadline of achieving the UN SDGs, the world must pivot from its traditional methods, as more aid and funding to governments alone will not meet these goals. Creating space for entrepreneurial solutions that work towards transforming innovations into low-cost products that can be scaled-up worldwide provides hope for the collective change we all aim to see towards achieving a more equitable world. I plan to bridge these learnings into my future career endeavors, in advancing the innovation agenda for international development.