

Becoming a Collaborative Changemaker: Redefining Impact through My Philanthropy Internship

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Entering the summer before my senior year of college, I began reflecting on how well my Peace Studies degree informed the path I wanted to take in life. With these initial reflections came a daunting anxiety felt by many liberal arts undergrads: whether the path I chose freshman year came out of passion, or out of optimistic naiveté about the society we live in.

Conversations with professors left me with anecdotes of being ‘a big fish in a small pond’. My education had widened my worldview, yet my environment stayed the same. My efforts to bring about change on campus and in affordable housing did little to satisfy my growing passions or quell my anxieties about meaningfully applying my degree. My studies informed me of a variety of ways to bring about systemic equity yet gave no opportunity to see this work firsthand or develop the skills to confidently maneuver through such systems upon graduation. I felt stunted in my growth as an activist in my community and began seeking a way into a larger social justice arena.

This brought me to Geneva Global’s doorstep, curious about the world of philanthropy and eager to revitalize my confidence in my passions. The opportunity to intern with the Donor Advising Team (DAT) enabled me to develop skills that directly apply to the work I aspire to do, while introducing me to a new approach to systemic change. Wanting to be pushed as student, individual, and community changemaker, I piloted a project management system, supported writing projects focused on collaborative donor initiatives, and analyzed donor giving data. Though these tasks were new to me, they provided the opening to the bigger pond I eagerly sought.

Project Management in Practice

I became aware of the need for effective project management after attempts to launch programs at my school. In line with this, my first internship project was to research and compare project management platforms for future team adoption. When I first joined the team, I was in awe of how often and clearly everyone communicated, and how integral this is to managing small- and large-scale projects successfully. Getting the chance to interview staff across varying positions afforded me the chance to better understand the dynamic of the team and work that is often behind-the-scenes in philanthropy.

The key takeaway from this project was that the project management platform will be a tool to *enhance* communication, not replace it. Additionally, seeing the various ways individuals managed their own tasks inspired me to find a system that would be dynamic enough to meet both individual and team needs. This emphasized the importance of developing my own project management style to be an effective leader of a collaborative team.

Bridging the Gap through Writing

The second project I supported involved developing concept notes, which introduced me to various new writing formats and gave me the opportunity to see how the philanthropic community engages globally. Concept notes are thoroughly researched and designed to communicate how organizations across the globe tackle social problems in an easily digestible yet informative way. The concept notes I helped develop highlighted work being done to tackle gender-based violence in Africa, various initiatives to combat climate change, and larger-scale, time-restricted programs aimed at decreasing child mortality rates. These writing pieces helped strengthen my writing abilities while exposing me to organizations I could one day join to bring about global change.

I also discovered that these notes aimed for more than just increased funding—they underscored the significance of collaboration in achieving impactful and enduring change. The work of these notes, and perhaps of Geneva Global as whole, was in bridging the gap between solutions and communities in need—connecting those with resources to the kind of grassroots organizations I engaged with in the past to bring about change. By bringing these two sectors in conversation with one another, Geneva Global helps sever the segmentation and out-competing for resources that is often a symptom of a lack of collaboration, despite our shared goals to create a society where everyone can flourish and achieve their full potential.

Assessing and Redefining One's Impact

Another project that reshaped my perspective involved analyzing donor giving data and visualizing trends. As a writer at heart, supporting data analysis and visualization was daunting! However, I was eager to learn this skill, and the entire team's encouraging nature helped ease any pressure I felt. My project leads were always readily accessible and happy to answer questions and provide more context.

As part of this, I analyzed the donors' giving based on focus area, geographic reach, and intervention type—three categories that are critical to assessing changemaking efforts and how to give more effectively. The results and trends were not only interesting to me, but also prompted me to think about my own ways of giving back: What areas am I passionate about seeing change in? Who will it help? What kind of change do I want to be part of?

I already knew education was my biggest passion. But when it came to *who* I wanted to help and *how*, I realized my own individualism was limiting me.

Leaving My Internship as a Reenergized Changemaker

Throughout various stages of my life, I have used my voice to empower others with the support and agency to improve their quality of life. Often, I've struggled to work collaboratively because others would see my passions as still being too naïvely optimistic. This created a wall that limited my reach and focus to how I could bring about change as an individual.

Working with Geneva Global was the first step in bringing down that wall. The team's collaboration at every level and encouragement through every hurdle showed me that effective collaboration was necessary to produce high quality work and meaningful outcomes. This emphasis on collaboration is not only evident in the team's functions—it's intrinsic to the work itself.

My gratitude for my Geneva Global internship is immense. The experience was enlightening, empowering, and provided me the constructive feedback, uplifting support, and skill building I needed to inform the kind of changemaker I want to be. As I embark on my next chapter, I do so with renewed passion and confidence, no longer confined to a small pond and eager to join a collective striving for meaningful change.