



DECLARATION 26

AN INNOVATION COUNTERPLAN TO PROJECT 2025

Prepared by

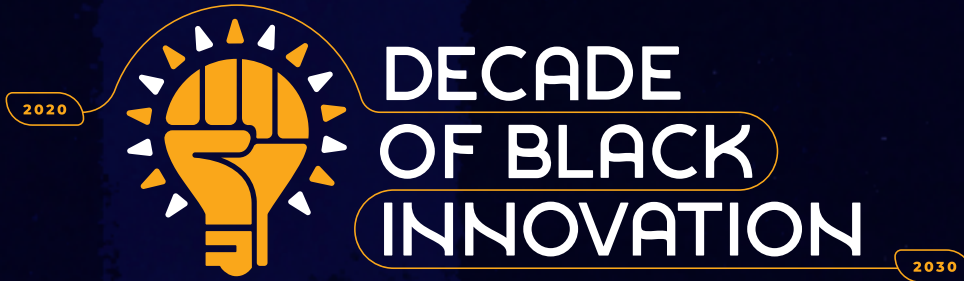


BLACK
INNOVATION
ALLIANCE



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Declaration '26 is part of The Decade of Black Innovation (DOBI), BIA's movement strategy for 2020 – 2030, aimed to accelerate fundraising, policy change, and advance narrative change on the realities of underserved entrepreneurs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the partners who have been instrumental in bringing **Declaration '26** to fruition.

Our sincere thanks go to the dedicated Team at Black Innovation Alliance for their unwavering commitment and visionary leadership throughout this initiative. We are deeply appreciative of Pink Cornrows for their creative insights and innovative approach to problem-solving. Our policy partners at Ice Miller have provided invaluable guidance and expertise, ensuring the robustness of our proposals. The artistic vision and design brilliance of Studio J. Lorne have brought our ideas to life in compelling ways. Finally, we thank Mercury for their strategic communications support, amplifying our message effectively. This collaborative effort exemplifies the power of partnership in driving meaningful change, and we are profoundly grateful for each partner's unique contributions to this critical endeavor.

Declaration 26 is an initiative of the Decade of Black Innovation. Special thank you to our steadfast funders and supporters who make this work possible, along with our board of directors and member network of greater than 100 innovator support organizations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DECLARATION '26 – EMPOWERING INNOVATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AND SHARED PROSPERITY

Project 2025 is a powerful demonstration of the ways conservative forces actively work to dismantle key protections and social programs, set to exacerbate inequality and undermine democratic institutions. The ongoing “fight for rights” reveals a stark divide between those most affected by policies and those shielded by economic privilege. This imbalance has created a cycle where many Americans are forced to prioritize defending their rights over pursuing economic growth and innovation. To break this cycle, we propose a paradigm shift: Innovation as a fundamental right and a national imperative.

KEY INSIGHTS WHICH CALL FOR A “RIGHT TO INNOVATE”

1. **Relationship Between Security and Liberties:** There is an inextricable link between economic empowerment and the ability to safeguard civil liberties;
2. **Innovation as a Catalyst:** Access to capital, entrepreneurship, and innovation are crucial levers for protecting and empowering the majority of the U.S. population;
3. **Barriers to Progress:** “Innovation Deserts,” limited access to funding, and the widening technology gap are stifling potential growth engines across the nation;
4. **National Security Implications:** The sustainability of our entrepreneurial ecosystem is directly tied to our national safety and global competitiveness.

In response to these challenges, the Black Innovation Alliance presents “**Declaration '26: An Innovation Counterplan to Project 2025.**” This initiative aims to reframe the narrative from scarcity to abundance, catalyzing policy and funding solutions that empower entrepreneurs as essential guardians of our hard-fought liberties.

Declaration '26 is built on three foundational principles:

1. **Addressing rampant inequality unlocks economic growth and revitalizes the American Dream**
2. **Accelerating investments in America's growth engines is key to national security and safety**
3. **Prioritizing development of America's "Innovation Deserts" must be a national imperative.**

Our vision culminates in *The Innovators' Bill of Rights*, establishing the necessary conditions for all Americans to innovate, thrive, and truly realize freedom.

America's legacy of innovation—from the light bulb to open-heart surgery—demonstrates our capacity to transform society through ingenuity. By equipping today's innovators with the tools to succeed, we strengthen our communities, protect our rights, and build resilience against adverse policies.

As 2026 represents the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, **Declaration '26** stands as a bold recommitment to the principles of equality, opportunity, and innovation that have defined the American experiment. It is a call to action for policymakers, thought leaders, and citizens to invest in our collective future with the urgency our current challenges demand.

Innovation is not just an option; it is a right and a necessity for a secure, prosperous, and equitable America. We are excited to kick off this conversation and look forward to building the future we each deserve.

Onward.

Kelly Burton, PhD
CEO, Black Innovation Alliance

SECTION ONE

DECLARATION '26 THREE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE ONE

Rampant Inequality Stifles Economic Growth and Blocks the American Dream

Individual freedom and personal fulfillment are key tenets of the American social contract and defining aspects of the American Dream.

However, widening economic inequality, stagnant wages and limited upward mobility call into question the lasting power of the American Dream and the extent to which America is capable of holding and advancing the hopes and aspirations of her people:

U.S. Outpaces Developed World in Income Inequality: According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the U.S. has the highest income [inequality](#)¹ of all the G7 countries, [as](#)² well as India and China.

Half of Americans Earn Less Than Their Parents Did: Only about 50% of Americans born in the 1980s have grown up to [earn](#)³ more than their parents did at the same age, compared to 90% of those born in the 1940s.

Middle-Class Families Are at Risk of Falling Behind: Children of [middle-income](#)⁴ parents have a near-equal likelihood of ending up in any other quintile, making a middle-class upbringing less of a buffer to sliding into poverty.

Corporate CEOs Make More Than Their Fair Share: CEO [compensation](#)⁵ grew by 1,322% from 1978 to 2022, far outstripping S&P stock market growth (817%), compared to just 18% for the typical worker.

When our nation is no longer able to deliver on the American Dream, and instead becomes a place where the rich are made richer at the expense of everyone else, then our greatest days are indeed behind us. But if we can turn it around and apply renewed focus, determination, creativity and rigor to building the future economy, the American Dream becomes more real to more communities.

PRINCIPLE TWO

Rapid Investments in America's Growth Engines is Key

A trend dating as far back as the 19th century Industrial Revolution, Americans have migrated to the big city manufacturing jobs and away from agricultural rural regions in pursuit of economic opportunities and driven by the promise of jobs, better wages, and improved living standards.

In recent decades, younger generations have been drawn to cities not only for traditional job opportunities but also for their dynamic environments that foster entrepreneurship and tech startups. As a result, about 83% of the U.S. population now resides in urban areas, where a significant portion of the nation's economic activity is concentrated. Metropolitan areas are the home to 96% of Fortune 500 company headquarters and account for 91% of the nation's total GDP.

Despite their economic significance, cities have historically received limited federal investment, mainly through specific grants. However, recent legislation, such as the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), has marked a significant shift in this trend, providing substantial federal funds to municipalities. Early evidence suggests these investments have already positively impacted urban areas by expanding public transit, reducing traffic congestion, and improving air quality in cities. Furthermore, the introduction and passage of the 2022 CHIPS (Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors) Act shows a recognition of the need to both increase the technology production but to fortify American cities as engines of growth in a digital economy. To fully harness the potential of these investments and address future challenges, the federal government should acknowledge densely populated areas as "growth engines" and accelerate funding to build a stronger, more resilient economy.

PRINCIPLE THREE

Prioritizing Investments in America's Innovation Deserts is a Must

While big cities in the United States are experiencing economic growth, many regions, particularly historically distressed states in the Deep South, Appalachian region, and Mountain West, continue to struggle in today's increasingly technological age.

These areas face persistent challenges due to a combination of geographic isolation, limited economic diversification, and reduced market access. Additionally, "brain drain," —the migration of educated individuals from rural areas and small towns to urban centers—exacerbates these problems, leaving these communities ill-equipped to thrive in the emerging innovation economy.

These "innovation deserts" lack the necessary resources and ecosystems to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, which are vital for future economic growth. The absence of innovation capacity in these regions leads to missed opportunities in high-value economic activities such as technology development, advanced manufacturing, and knowledge-based services, resulting in lower productivity and GDP growth. Addressing these disparities with targeted investments in infrastructure, education, and economic diversification is crucial to spurring local growth, reducing economic inequalities, and enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy. In contrast, inaction could lead to further economic decline and deepened regional inequalities.

SECTION TWO

POLICIES ESTABLISHING THE RIGHT TO INNOVATE

As policies and appropriations are reflections of our values, here are the concrete strategies which help establish that innovation is a fundamental right and an economic imperative.

STRATEGY ONE

Deepening and Targeting Investment in the Nation's Growth Hubs

While federal block grants encounter limitations, their intention of allocating resources to address specific needs is still sound.

An enhanced, reimagined federal grants program focused on expanding innovation access is needed to provide:

- A.** Substantial, flexible funding directly to city governments, enabling them to invest in emergent technology solutions;
- B.** Future-proof workforce development strategies, innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems and;
- C.** Other interventions designed to attract capital, cultivate home-grown talent, launch new industries and better access global markets.

Deepening and Targeting Investment in the Nation's Growth Hubs

STRATEGY

01

Policy priorities include:

- » Cultivating Innovation and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems
- » Promoting Future-Proof Workforce Development Strategies
- » Funding Public Education Innovation Challenges
- » Expanding Global Market Access

Existing initiatives include:

- » Regional Innovation Technology Hubs Program
- » Community Development Block Grants Program

Shortcomings of existing initiatives:

- » Cities need more direct access to funding that goes beyond community development to focus on inclusive growth.
- » Regional Innovation Technology Hubs' grant funding process needs more input from diverse stakeholders including the development of more explicit scoring and weighting proposals that incorporate diverse innovators.

What's needed to meet the opportunity:

- » More flexible grant funding that cities can apply for directly.
- » More explicit scoring and wiring proposals that incorporate diverse innovators and communities.

STRATEGY TWO

Federal Innovation Funding to Meet the Needs of Innovation Deserts and Historically Distressed Regions

Providing targeted, flexible funding directly to state and local governments, empowers them to invest in critical infrastructure, education and skills training, broadband expansion, and economic diversification initiatives.

This funding would support the development of future-forward industries, enhance regional competitiveness, and address structural challenges that have hindered economic growth in these areas for decades. By focusing on building the capacity for innovation, supporting small business development, and fostering public-private partnerships, these states can cultivate a robust economic foundation that creates jobs, attracts new investments, and improves the quality of life for their residents.

02

STRATEGY

Federal Innovation Funding to Meet the Needs of Innovation Deserts and Historically Distressed Regions

Policy priorities include:

- » Universal Broadband Access by 2030
- » Rural Innovation Challenge
- » Restoring and Rewiring America's Main Street
- » Funding Public Education Innovation Challenges
- » Cultivating Innovation and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and
- » Promoting Future-Proof Workforce Development Strategies

Existing initiatives include:

- » National Telecommunications and Information Administration Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program
- » National Telecommunications and Information Administration Digital Equity Program
- » U.S. Dept. of Agriculture ReConnect Program
- » Regional Innovation Tech Hubs Program
- » Community Development Block Grant Programs
- » DOL Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Shortcomings of existing initiatives:

- » Developing broadband assessments to provide granular data at the city level has a significant cost and there are not existing federal subsidies to engage in broadband assessments
- » There are limited dollars for outreach to diverse innovators and ecosystems
- » There is limited input from diverse community leaders for grant funding criteria and decisions

What's needed to meet the opportunity:

- » Additional funding for broadband assessments accessible to cities
- » Establishing robust outreach funding for federal programs to improve participation
- » Establishing more explicit scoring and weighting proposals that incorporate diverse innovators and institutions

STRATEGY THREE

Capital Access for Disadvantaged Businesses

Access to capital is essential for the nation's entrepreneurs, as it enables them to start, grow, and scale businesses that drive innovation, job creation, and economic growth.

However, many entrepreneurs face significant barriers to accessing capital, particularly those from underserved communities, women, and businesses owned by people of color. Without adequate access to capital, these businesses struggle to expand, innovate, and compete, leading to lost economic opportunities and stagnation. Studies have shown that limited access to capital can significantly hinder economic output. For instance, a [report](#)⁶ by Morgan Stanley found that if businesses owned by people of color had equal access to capital, it could add \$4.4 trillion to the U.S. economy. Similarly, [research](#)⁷ from the Small Business Administration (SBA) indicates that small businesses create nearly two-thirds of net new jobs, highlighting the critical role of capital in fueling economic dynamism and resilience.

By acting now to provide greater access to capital, the nation can unlock the full potential of its entrepreneurial talent, drive innovation, and maintain its global edge.

03 STRATEGY

Capital Access for Disadvantaged Businesses

Policy priorities include:

- » Improve Access to Federal Seed/Venture Funding
- » Beef Up System of Federal Guarantees and Subsidies for Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners

Existing initiatives include:

- » Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer (SBIR/STTR) Programs
- » Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) Program
- » State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)

Shortcomings of existing initiatives:

- » The SBIR and STTR program funding is allocated based on agency budget. Including more agencies with a consumer-facing focus would drive participation of diverse innovators. There is also limited funding for technical assistance and outreach to innovation deserts.
- » SBIC funds need more incentives to invest in women and minority led enterprises.
- » SSBCI funding needs to be increased and better integrated through the cities and their community led funding initiatives. Currently the SSBCI funding is administered through the States.

What's needed to meet the opportunity:

- » Leverage America's Seed Fund, the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs to Reach Diverse Innovators
- » Improve Access to funding through SBA-backed SBIC Funds Through Investment in Outreach and Incentive Programs
- » Increase Investments in the SSBCI Program Including Direct Funding to Cities
- » Enhance the Federal System of Guarantees and Subsidies for Financial Institutions to Offer Tailored Financial products for Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners

STRATEGY FOUR

University Consortium on the Future

The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence and the profound influence of social media on both physical and emotional well-being—alongside critical concerns for national security—have exposed a significant knowledge gap among policymakers responsible for regulating these fast-evolving technologies.

The University Consortium on the Future would be a government funded think tank whose sole responsibility would be to provide non-partisan insights on the role the federal government ought to play in fostering the future economy. Staffed by leading academics, researchers and public intellectuals across America's university system, the Consortium would provide evidence-based recommendations on how best to incubate and regulate future technologies, as well as how best to socialize and proliferate learnings and best practices.

04 STRATEGY

University Consortium on the Future

Policy priorities include:

- » Cross-agency integration to ensure a sustainable implementation strategy
- » Adequate funding to agency and non-government stakeholders to bridge gaps, advance solutions and increase access to innovative tools in real time

Existing initiatives include:

- » National Science Foundation's Industry-University Cooperative Research Centers Program

Shortcomings of existing initiatives:

- » Limited influence in informing policy debates related to the future economy.
- » Limited visibility and scale
- » Focused more on driving research partnership for industrial and commercial aims, and less for the purpose of thought leadership on America's future economy.

What's needed to meet the opportunity:

- » Increased visibility and deeper investment in elevating and socializing key insights designed to extend America's competitive advantage

SECTION THREE

HOW BLACK INNOVATION ALLIANCE IS SECURING THE RIGHT TO INNOVATE

The Black Innovation Alliance (BIA) fundamentally believes that establishing the right to innovate results in a significant reduction of the known barriers which prevent the fulfillment of the American entrepreneurial dream. By fostering a dynamic ecosystem linking entrepreneurs and innovators to capital, networks and markets, BIA is not just committed to building successful businesses, but we're also transforming how business is done overall. Our work continues to demonstrate that deliberate and well-funded strategies focused on strong Black economies yield stronger economies overall.

Recognizing that none of this work meets the masses without policy intervention, BIA successfully advocated for the creation of the Congressional Caucus on Black Innovation in 2021—chaired by United States Representative Stacey Plaskett, Representative Marilyn Strickland and Representative Ritchie Torres. Subsequently, BIA was invited to partner with the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans and together, the team created webinar and technical assistance opportunities for Black entrepreneurs and Black innovator support organizations (ISOs). Because of this advocacy, policymakers have a more accurate understanding of the unique responsibilities and experiences of Black entrepreneurs, the many ways Black innovation has enhanced economic growth, and the new rules needed to be written to ensure access and inclusion remains a national priority.

BIA also recognizes that policy is just one part of the overall effort. Access to capital, increasing the number of tech-enabled businesses, and sustaining innovators at every stage of their business endeavors are parallel efforts that our team is addressing and modeling for the public.

Current and developing BIA projects which build upon Declaration '26 include:

BIA Program Intervention Snapshot

Entrepreneurial Convenings & Industry Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » BLADECon » Sustainability Summit
Narrative Change and Thought Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » From Chains to Links: The Innovation Podcast » The” Clap Back” Campaign Against Racial Aggression
Research, Policy and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Black Innovation Census » The BLADE (Black Liberation and the Digital Economy) Report » AI, Supplier Diversity and Digital Entrepreneurship BIA Commissions
Capital and Support for Entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Innovator Hub » BIA Believes in You

To learn more about these programs and others, visit [our site](#).

Over the next several months, BIA will stand for every entrepreneurs’ right to innovate by:

- » Accelerating Decade of Black Innovation Capital Campaign to create a state of the art \$1 billion entrepreneurial ecosystem to address the racial wealth gap for Black entrepreneurs—one of the leading and fastest growing economic drivers in our nation;
- » Convening thought partners to aggregate the best interventions and strategies;
- » Organizing advocates, institutional leaders and policymakers to stand in the gap of all those simply trying to build their business, support their families, and positively impact their communities.

We live in a technological age. Failure to cast a bold vision that centers technology, innovation and inclusion is a recipe for stagnation and retrograde. At Black Innovation Alliance, we transform ideas to wealth solutions, accelerating prosperity and financial liberation for Black entrepreneurs, because we know that when Black people do better, we all do better.

SECTION FOUR

THE BIA INNOVATORS' BILL OF RIGHTS

We, the designers, visionaries and believers of an abundant future and inclusive economy, declare that entrepreneurs have the:

RIGHT TO ACCESS & EDUCATION

Every entrepreneur shall have equal access to technological resources, education and innovation platforms.

RIGHT TO EQUITY

Innovators shall receive equitable support and resources, irrespective of their background, to eliminate the innovation gap.

RIGHT TO OWNERSHIP

Innovators have the right to ownership and protection of their intellectual property to encourage creativity and economic growth.

RIGHT TO PROSPEROUS LEGACY

Innovators have the right to create and contribute to a legacy of prosperity, wealth and sustainability through their entrepreneurial endeavors.

RIGHT TO SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

Innovations should promote sustainability and the well-being of our planet for future generations.

RIGHT TO COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Communities have the right to support local innovations that address their specific needs and challenges, including those connected to historical oppression.

RIGHT TO DATA INTEGRITY

Individuals have the right to weigh in on the ways data is impacting their lives, well-being and communities—and be included in material decisionmaking concerning the presence of data within the digital present and future.

DECLARATION '26

CONCLUSION

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, **Declaration '26** stands as a powerful recommitment to the principles of equality, opportunity, and innovation that have long defined the American experiment. It challenges us to confront the barriers that have prevented many from fully participating in the nation's prosperity and to invest in a future where innovation is a right accessible to all.

Declaration '26 offers a vision of hope and a roadmap for action. It reminds us that by empowering innovators and entrepreneurs across all communities, we can build a more resilient, prosperous, and equitable nation—one where the American Dream is within reach for all. BIA will continue to expand on this vision, and we invite you to remain connected with us as we offer short and long term strategies on our right to innovate.



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THE RIGHT TO INNOVATE BEGINS HERE

ABOUT BLACK INNOVATION ALLIANCE

Founded in 2020, Black Innovation Alliance (BIA) is the premier network powering Black innovation and economic transformation. We swiftly launch high-impact programs that disrupt limiting systems and create pathways to wealth. Our agile solutions tackle harmful economic conditions head-on, proving that everyone has the right to innovate. By fostering a thriving Black innovation ecosystem, we're building a stronger economy for all. This report is a part of our Decade of Black Innovation (2020 – 2030) campaign which aims to accelerate capital, policies, and narratives to transform the current realities of Black entrepreneurs, innovators and communities.

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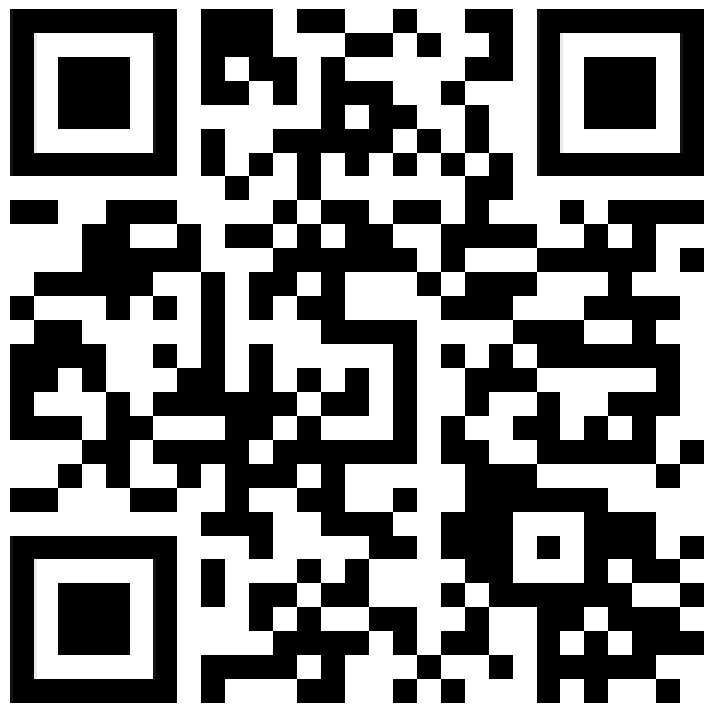
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