

A Letter from GFCC Founder & President  
Deborah L. Wince-Smith

# 2025: A Year of Partnership, Leadership, and Building for the Future



The world continues to navigate a period of remarkable complexity – one defined by multiple crises, rapid technological transformation, and evolving geopolitical dynamics. Yet, amid these profound shifts, we find ourselves in a moment of extraordinary, new possibilities.

And the GFCC is thriving in this era of disruption and discontinuity – as leaders around the world seek to co-create solutions for the future. Our community is motivated by the urgent need to accelerate global prosperity, by embedding innovation-driven competitiveness thinking, frameworks, and strategies across economies – making them a critical policy cornerstone to drive economic and productivity growth, raise living standards, and transform societies and economies.

Across the GFCC network, we have witnessed new opportunities emerge through the work, partnerships, and collaboration that takes place between our members, fellows, and partners. Each initiative, exchange, and engagement has reinforced our shared commitment to shaping a more innovative, resilient, and prosperous future for all.

Of course, 2025 has marked a special anniversary, as we have celebrated 15 years as a community, truly convinced that our collective mission remains more relevant and timely than ever. Today, we are a global beacon for:

- universities seeking to play a defining role in their innovation economies,
- businesses and organizations looking for strategic insights and meaningful connections, and
- leaders eager to share best practices and to build a better world in a distinctive environment of trust, experience, and wisdom.

This year, as in every year since the founding of the GFCC, I wish to extend my heartfelt thank you to our Chair, Mr. Chad Holliday, whose vision and steadfast leadership since 2010 continue to inspire and guide our organization. We are indebted to him and inspired by his innovative sight throughout the years.

I also want to recognize Mr. Charles Kiefel AM, Vice-Chair of our Board of Trustees, for his work to expand the reach and impact of the GFCC, and for inspiring a new generation of GFCC Ambassadors to advance our mission.

The GFCC community currently comprises 42 members spanning 19 nations. In addition, our fellows come from 24 countries. Our total global footprint amounts to three dozen countries across six continents in the world. This outstanding group of individuals and organizations represents a remarkable blend of economic, cultural, and organizational diversity.

## **2025 Highlights**

This year we hosted for the first time our Global Innovation Summit in partnership with the Council on Competitiveness and its series of “Competitiveness Conversations Across America,” between October 19 and 21, in Pittsburgh, United States.

***Forging the Future: The Intersection of Health, AI and Tech*** brought together over 300 participants from 20 countries across industry, academia, government, and other critical stakeholder groups.

For three days, leaders exchanged ideas and strategies around a series of issues at the heart of future competitiveness: trends in health technologies, the intersection of health and transformative computing, the future of advanced manufacturing, and strategies to advance place-making innovation. The summit included an incredible array of panelists, moderators, and keynote speakers, including Pennsylvania’s Governor Josh Shapiro and two US Senators, Dave McCormick and John Fetterman.

During the gathering, the GFCC launched its ***2025 Call to Action – Advancing Competitiveness in a Turbulent and Fast-Changing World***, a strategic framework outlining ten competitiveness priorities for stakeholders across sectors to enhance productivity, foster growth, and raise living standards.

During the Annual Meeting on October 19, we hosted a pioneer working session with GFCC members and fellows to advance the implementation of the strategies outlined in the Call to Action.

This productive dialogue generated ideas to shape an Action Agenda and led to the formation of two global task forces. The first will focus on humans in the age of AI, and the second on accelerating the sharing of best practices to drive prosperity across geographies and demographics.

The success of Forging the Future would not have been possible without the invaluable support and leadership of our hosts. My heartfelt gratitude to the University of Pittsburgh and to Chancellor Joan Gabel – who also serves as the Academic Vice-chair of the Council on Competitiveness. Similarly, I want to thank Carnegie Mellon University and President Farnam Jahanian, who serves on the Council’s Executive Committee.

During Forging the Future, we also presented an array of Global Competitiveness Awards to an outstanding group of leaders.

We were delighted to recognize Joan Gabel, the first woman to lead the University of Pittsburgh since its founding in 1787, for her *Inspiring Leadership, Action, and Impact in Cultivating the Talent, Technology, and Infrastructure Shaping the Future Innovation Economy*.

Chancellor Gabel has guided the university through a bold, metrics-driven strategy that has propelled Pitt into the top tier of global research universities. The university has now set records in enrollment, graduation rates, research expenditures, and post-graduation placement.

President Farnam Jahanian received the award for *Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation*. President Jahanian has led CMU into a new era of distinction, having, for example, overseen extraordinary growth in the university's research portfolio.

We were also delighted to bestow awards to two exceptional doctors who have contributed significantly to advancing science and human progress: Dr. Mehmood Khan, CEO of the Hevolution Foundation, and Dr. Harris Pastides, President Emeritus of the University of South Carolina.

Dr. Khan received the award in recognition of his *Visionary Leadership in Advancing Global Health Research and Innovation*. His remarkable journey began in medicine, but he also played multiple leadership roles at multinational corporations – as well as having served as the Chair of the Council on Competitiveness. Today, he leads the world's largest philanthropic funder of healthspan science.

Dr. Pastides received the award for *Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation*. He presided over record-setting enrollment at the University of South Carolina, a billion-dollar capital campaign, and the awarding of more than 117,000 degrees. His legacy also lies in his championing of access, affordability, and innovation in education.

Forging the Future provided a unique platform for our members, fellows and an exceptional community of tech, research, business and policy leaders from across the world to exchange ideas, connect, and forge strategic partnerships that will help advance their organizations' agendas.

And throughout the year, we also held other similar activities and engagements with our members that have helped to advance our mission, and shape competitiveness best practices and strategies worldwide.

In 2025, we continued to advance our University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF) **Leadership in Place-making Innovation** through an exciting study trip to discover Lisbon's innovation ecosystem, hosted by our member Catholic University of Portugal.

This model of engagement offered a real-world exposure to innovation through an exploration of key innovation hubs in the Portuguese capital and discussions over how higher education institutions are partnering with industry and various stakeholders to transform Lisbon.

We visited multiple innovation centers, including the AIHub, the Unicorn Factory, Grupo Nabeiro, Siemens Tech Hub, and the Champalimaud Foundation— a world-class institute focused on advanced

biomedical research and translational, interdisciplinary clinical care, a key theme that was at the core of Forging the Future.

We also had the opportunity to exchange with local leaders and entrepreneurs, learn about the strategies laid out to build a powerful innovation ecosystem around the city, build connections, explore opportunities for joint work, envision future partnerships involving organizations, and mobilizing assets across the GFCC and globally.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Isabel Capelo Gil, Rector of the Catholic University of Portugal, Prof. Miguel Athayde Marques, Vice-President of the institution, and their team for the support and hospitality in organizing the study trip and hosting our Community.

In 2025, we also participated in important international meetings and conferences organized by GFCC members and leading organizations in various countries. These activities served to communicate our mission and the importance of collaboration to boost competitiveness and inclusive prosperity worldwide, as well as to share best practices and exchanges between our global leadership network.

This year, we had a very busy agenda.

- a) In February and March, the GFCC participated in strategic meetings of the Brazilian Business Mobilization for Innovation (MEI), which gathers the CEOs of the main Brazilian companies and is led by GFCC sustaining member the Brazilian National Industry Confederation (CNI).
- b) In April, GFCC leaders joined the Delphi Economic Forum in Greece.
- c) In May, we participated in the launch of the Advisory Council on Competitiveness (ACC) in Bulgaria, where I was proud to see the GFCC serving as a blueprint for the development of this most relevant organization.
- d) Also in May, we took part in the Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum 2025 in Romania, where we discussed strategies to safeguard economic prosperity amid a global policy crisis.
- e) In July, the GFCC was represented in a Mission to Australia co-hosted by the Council on Competitiveness and the Australian Advisory Board on Competitiveness. Led by GFCC Vice-chair Mr. Charles Kiefel AM, this week-long innovation immersion across Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, and Adelaide included a significant summit in Sydney – bringing together over 100 private and public sector leaders from across Australia, and releasing a major U.S.-Australia innovation call-to-action.
- f) In August, I had the honor of keynoting in the 7th Exhibition Brasilia + IT in Brasília, representing the GFCC.
- g) In September, GFCC Distinguished Fellow Frank-Jürgen Richter hosted the 2025 Horasis Global Meeting in São Paulo, Brazil – with GFCC leaders chairing sessions.



Alongside this array of events and discussions with our GFCC members, our efforts as a community encompassed an even broader range of activities, including regular membership engagements, strategic partnerships with members, and the successful expansion of our network—details of which I will outline in the following paragraphs.

## Expanding our impact

In 2025, we continued to engage our community in exclusive Monthly Calls focused on relevant issues shaping the world and making an impact on innovation and competitiveness. This year, we hosted high-profile guest speakers on discussions ranging from investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia to future economic prospects and S&T opportunities in Africa, as well as strategies to build an innovation hub in Auckland, New Zealand – and many others.

We also continued to co-create with our members. In 2025, we hosted two webinars in partnership with Lockheed Martin, surveying strategies and tools to build resilient physical and digital infrastructures for the future.

We also co-developed an Action Paper in partnership with Harper Adams University, surveying ways and strategies to **Boost the Productivity and Regeneration of Natural Resources** stemming from the **2024 Call to Action -Achieving a Sustainable Future for All**. I want to thank Prof. Ken Sloan, Vice-Chancellor and CEO of Harper Adams University, and Dr. Graham McAuliffe, Reader in Environmental Assessments of Food Systems, who provided invaluable insights to the paper, which later led to an interactive and dynamic webinar open to our global Community.

Yet, in 2025 we have advanced our Leadership in Place-making Innovation on multiple fronts. In addition to our study trip to Lisbon, we have published an inspiring **case study of the Birmingham Innovation Precinct**, a project shepherded by GFCC member Aston University, under the leadership of Prof. Aleks Subic, Aston's Vice-Chancellor and CEO.

Also with Aston, we have published a **concept paper on place-making innovation**, establishing a pioneering conceptual framework for a new way to map regional strengths, assets, and challenges – and highlighting a roadmap for public and private sector leaders to transform and optimize local and regional economies for a future in which innovation will be ever more important.

I am grateful for Professor Subic's leadership and inspiring work to advance our initiative and the broader vision around place-making innovation, which is becoming a reality through the efforts of Aston University.

These exciting activities are just a few examples of the potential the GFCC holds when we bring together leaders and organizations across sectors to co-create strategies and best practices around competitiveness.

As we transition from 2025 to 2026, the GFCC stands on firm ground, and our membership continues to grow, garner visibility, and gain influence. In 2025, we welcomed three new members:

- The Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia (MISA)
- The University of Adelaide
- The Albanian Council on Competitiveness and Innovation

I am particularly proud to reconnect with our colleagues in MISA, which joined as a Sustaining Member. This membership brings us back to the early days of the GFCC when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was an active leader in our network through the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA; a GFCC co-founder).

We have also welcomed two new Fellows to our illustrious ranks:

- The Honorable Arthur Sinodinos – Ambassador Sinodinos has had a distinguished career in public service and the financial sector. As Australia's Ambassador to the United States, he played an instrumental role in advancing the AUKUS alliance, the Quad, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.
- The Honorable John Anderson AC – Mr. Anderson's extensive record in Australian public life includes nearly two decades in Parliament, where he served as Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, Transport and Regional Development, and Transport and Regional Services, among other senior roles.

These leaders bring extraordinary experience and insight to our global network, further strengthening the GFCC's ability to catalyze collaboration and strategic foresight.

Finally, in 2025, we have inaugurated a new GFCC Visual Identity, which refreshes our image, providing a more contemporary look to our organization. This change has come about through a fruitful collaboration with Landmark, an Albanian digital agency under the Albanian Council on Competitiveness and Innovation. Across our digital and printed materials, you will find a refreshed logo and color palette symbolizing sophistication, global relevance, and forward-looking purpose.

We invite you all to check out the GFCC new visual identity and to incorporate GFCC branding elements in your own materials, highlighting your affiliation with our organization. Check out and use this special webpage to engage with our new GFCC visual identity.

### **Shaping the future**

As we close our 15th anniversary year, we do so with renewed determination on the strength of our mission.

We will continue to build bold initiatives and strategies to accelerate innovation and competitiveness at every level: regional, national and global.

In 2026, we will continue to expand GFCC's leadership role by engaging in the following activities:

- Relaunching the GFCC Fellowship Program for Greater Impact: our fellowship community spans five continents, and it is an outstanding asset. We are conducting a thorough review of the current program for greater impact.
- Curating and leading new study trips: our next destination for the URLF study trip is set. I am excited to announce that Dr. Pradeep Khosla, Chancellor of the University of California San Diego, will host between 20-23 July 2026 a special GFCC study trip across the greater San Diego innovation ecosystem along with an edition of the “Competitiveness Conversations Across America”.
- Initiating a new, learning journey through The Global Leadership Excellence Programme (GLEP): the GFCC is preparing to deliver with Aston University, Queen’s University Belfast, the University of California San Diego, and Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS a unique, 26-week course – combining the strengths of each institution along with those of participating GFCC members, blending cutting-edge academic content with hands-on leadership development, and real-world practice.
- Advancing two task forces launched during Forging the Future. *Task Force One - Building Human Advantage in the AI Economy*, under the leadership of Prof. Aleks Subic, will focus on: strengthening capabilities to empower humanity in the era of AI; and, surveying policy, education, skills, and ethics to propel innovation, inclusiveness and prosperity. *Task Force Two - Leveling the Playing Field through Competitiveness*, under the leadership of Prof. Ken Sloan and Dr. Hippolyte Fofack, former Chief Economist of Afreximbank and GFCC Distinguished Fellow, will work to systematize and disseminate global innovation and competitiveness best practices to support, in particular, emerging economies and regions. A goal is to bridge gaps and make positive, new, innovation-enhancing connections between the North-South and East-West.

Finally, I want to let you know we are starting a new donation campaign to support the expansion of our activities and initiatives. I want to thank GFCC Senior Fellow Deborah Gordon for her generous initial financial contribution to our mission.

The next 15 years will demand greater ambition than the 15 we just traversed. We need to redouble efforts to expand our network, advance thought leadership, and deepen our impact in driving productivity; building resilient, innovation-driven economies; and uplifting people and communities worldwide.

Thank you for your partnership for the first 15 years of the GFCC. Together, we have built momentum, and we look forward to working with you to co-create enduring pathways to innovation, resilience, and shared prosperity for the next 15!



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