



# Advancing Competitiveness in an Era of Disruption and Discontinuity

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2025 - 2026**

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### From Health to Tech: The Productivity Impact

Ted Carter	President, The Ohio State University Executive Committee Member, Council on Competitiveness, USA	Charles "Chad" O'Halloran	Chairman, GFCC, USA Chair Emeritus, Council on Competitiveness, USA
Joan Gabel	Chancellor, University of Pittsburgh Academic Vice-Chair, Council on Competitiveness, USA	Faramarz Jahanian	President, Carnegie Mellon University Executive Committee Member, Council on Competitiveness, USA
Jeffrey P. Gold	President, University of Nebraska System Executive Committee Member, Council on Competitiveness, USA	Harris Pastides	President Emeritus, University of South Carolina, USA President, GRC, USA

President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

# Opening Message

## Opening Message

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

The work of the GFCC has gained additional relevance in this era of disruption and discontinuity – as leaders around the world seek to develop strategies and 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.

This year's Global Innovation Summit (GIS) was one of these exceptional moments of co-creation. *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, in Pittsburgh, United States, on October 19-21.



GFCC President Deborah L. Wince-Smith speaks at *Forging the Future: The Intersection of Health, AI and Tech*, in Pittsburgh, U.S.



Left to Right: Carnegie Mellon University President Dr. Farnam Jahanian, University of South Carolina President Emeritus Dr. Harris Pastides, GFCC President The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith, GFCC Chairman Charles "Chad" O. Holliday Jr., University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Joan Gabel, University of Nebraska System President Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, GFCC Treasurer Chad Evans, GFCC Executive Director Roberto Alvarez

## For the first time, we host our annual event in partnership with the Council on Competitiveness and its series of **“Competitiveness Conversations Across America”**.

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.

During the gathering, the **GFCC launched the 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.

On October 19, during the Annual Meeting, we hosted a pioneer working session with GFCC members and fellows to advance the implementation of the strategies outlined in the Call to Action. Building on that, the GFCC is launching two global task forces to drive action and implement the guidelines set out in the document.

The success of *Forging the Future* would not have been possible without the invaluable support and leadership of our hosts. We are grateful to the University of Pittsburgh and to Chancellor Joan Gabel, and to Carnegie Mellon University and President Farnam Jahanian, for receiving our Community in Pittsburgh.

*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.

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 Leadership in Place-making Innovation initiative through an exciting study trip to discover Lisbon's innovation ecosystem, hosted by our member Catholic University of Portugal.**



GFCC members at Catholic University of Portugal in Lisbon discussing the local innovation ecosystem.

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 are grateful to Prof. Isabel Capela Gil, President 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 across our global leadership network.

## This year, we had a very busy agenda.



### 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 Confederation of Industry (CNI).

### April

GFCC leaders joined the Delphi Economic Forum in Greece.

### May

The GFCC participated in the launch of the Bulgarian Advisory Council on Competitiveness (BACC) in Sofia, an organization that used the GFCC framework as a blueprint for its foundation.

Leaders 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.

### July

The GFCC was represented in a Mission to Australia co-hosted by the Council on Competitiveness and GFCC member 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. The mission culminated with the release of a major U.S.-Australia innovation call to action inaugurating a new strategic alliance on economic and security matters.

### August

GFCC President Deborah L. Wince Smith was a keynote speaker in the 7th Exhibition Brasilia + TI in Brasília, representing the GFCC.

### 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, 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.

This year we have also inaugurated a new 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 operating 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.

Finally, we are delighted that Glavbolgarstroy Holding (GBS) will host our 2026 Annual Meeting and the GIS in Sofia, Bulgaria, in the second semester of 2026.

This report invites you to learn more about our work and engage with us.

We hope you enjoy the reading.



GFCC members working on the recommendations of the 2025 *Call to Action: Advancing Competitiveness in a Turbulent and Fast-Changing World* during the Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, US.

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# From the GFCC Leadership

FROM THE GFCC LEADERSHIP

# Unlocking Human Potential in the Age of AI

Signed by



Charles O. Holliday Jr.  
Chairman Emeritus, Council on Competitiveness, United States  
Chairman, GFCC



Deborah L. Wince-Smith  
President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness, United States  
President, GFCC

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

While AI's capacity to automate tasks, generate rapid responses, and even perform portions of our daily intellectual work has captured our collective awareness and imagination, we are still witnessing only the early stages of AI's deployment across businesses, governments, and institutions around the world.

At *Forging the Future: The Intersection of Health, AI and Tech*, the 2025 edition of our GFCC Global Innovation (GIS) held in Pittsburgh, we heard from academics, business leaders, policymakers, and entrepreneurs how AI is driving a profound paradigm shift in healthcare as well as across a broad swathe of industry verticals and society at large.

In the health sector, AI is strengthening clinical decision-support, improving patient experiences, streamlining administrative processes, accelerating drug discovery, and raising the success rates of clinical trials.

**But a central insight emerged during the GIS: AI is not a standalone solution. It enables human-centered systems and capabilities, with some of our colleagues calling it “Augmented Intelligence.”**

## **Nonetheless, while AI can amplify human capacity, it cannot at present capture the full scope of human potential. This brings us to the critical question looming on the horizon: how do leaders and societies harness the most valued human skills in the age of AI?**

Leaders everywhere now face a dual challenge: aligning AI with their value propositions, and preparing their teams for a world in which leaders must strengthen and activate in new ways distinctly human qualities – such as creativity, leadership, problem-solving, learning, and trust.

The GFCC is uniquely positioned to help leaders and organizations strategize on how to navigate this emerging landscape in economies and societies.

Since 2010, we have worked with stakeholders across sectors, leveraging their collective wisdom and real-world experiences, to produce original insights and share best practices on the forces shaping the future of competitiveness at all levels: global, regional, and local.

Maximizing human potential by investing in skills development has been at the core of our agenda throughout the years. Our discussions consistently emphasize the need to build and boost talent pipelines as key to innovation, at the same time, integrating diverse geographies and demographics into strategic initiatives.

We have published multiple reports, hosted webinars, and created global conferences to survey future skills as a key driver of innovation and economic prosperity.

In Pittsburgh, we launched a new initiative: the **Task Force on Humans and Artificial Intelligence**, chaired by Prof. Aleks Subic, Vice-Chancellor and CEO of Aston University, to examine the implications of the extensive use of AI for policy, education, skills, ethics, inclusion, and productivity.

We have also deployed a global survey to gather insights that will inform the development of a Global Narrative and Action Plan on how humans and intelligent systems can co-evolve to enhance productivity, innovation, and inclusive prosperity in the AI economy.

As we move forward, our shared responsibility is clear: to find productive ways to harness AI as a force to enhance human potential, to drive productivity and sustainable economic growth, and to promote security and prosperity for nations, regions, and communities.

Together with our global community, **the GFCC** will continue to champion a vision in which technology and humanity advance **side by side**, building more innovative, resilient, and prosperous societies for generations to come.

FROM THE GFCC LEADERSHIP

# Doubling Down on Humanity and Action

Signed by



**Roberto Alvarez**  
GFCC Executive Director

A few years ago, we launched the project Innovating Out of Crisis recognizing that we were entering turbulent waters. Since then, turbulence has only become more evident. It should now be clear that humanity will hardly meet the goals set in the Paris Agreement.

The climate is shifting, extreme weather is more frequent, and artificial intelligence is beginning to reshape industries, economies, and societies. Yet, what we are seeing is only the tip of the iceberg. Much more is coming. Add to that a global geopolitical landscape marked by rising competition, and it becomes evident that turbulence is not an exception but the norm.

In this context, resilience has never been more important. The central question is how countries, cities, and organizations can build it. There are three essential paths. The first is to create buffer capacity. The second is to develop new capabilities to deal with change and crisis. The third is to learn from others, to connect, to tap into knowledge assets beyond one's own boundaries.

**This is where the GFCC plays a unique role.**

Our diverse community brings together leaders who have faced hardship, built partnerships and transformed realities. Through valuable exchanges between peers, the GFCC becomes a tool that members and partners can rely on to better navigate today's turbulence. A crucial chapter of this is artificial intelligence.

The GFCC has been discussing AI and workforce development for years, and we are now pioneering a new initiative: the Task Force Building Human Advantage in the AI Economy. The title is intentional. This is not only about AI. It is about doubling down on humans.

We must engage in a practical effort. Our work examining innovation ecosystems around the world has emphasized place-making innovation. Competitiveness and innovation strategies need to materialize somewhere. They need to materialize on the ground through new jobs, better jobs, new value creation, new innovative companies, and thriving communities. Impact on the ground is the real measure of success for any innovation and competitiveness agenda.

Through our study trips to innovation ecosystems, **we are not only sharing best practices, we are also enabling direct connections that can spark new initiatives.** At our Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, we took a further step. We released a call to action focused on execution and launched two task forces. One places humans at the center of the AI revolution as already mentioned above. The other focuses on lifting those who are behind by sharing insights, knowledge, and best practices across our global community.

The GFCC is not an ordinary community. Every time I join a GFCC gathering, I am struck by its diversity, the strength of its voices, the depth of its expertise, and the genuine willingness to act.

In 2025 and beyond, we will be mobilizing this unique resource – our community. We will double down on humanity and bet on action. **We wait for you to join us on the journey.**

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# 2025 Impact



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, on October 19-21, 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.



We welcomed **three new members**: the Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia, which 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), Adelaide University and the Albanian Council on Competitiveness and Innovation.



We also had the honor of welcoming **two Distinguished Fellows**: The Honorable Arthur Sinodinos AO and The Honorable John Anderson AC, expanding our impact in the Pacific region.



We hosted **15 online events**. Two webinars in partnership with Lockheed Martin explored strategies for designing, implementing, maintaining, and improving digital and physical infrastructure. We also held a critical conversation stemming from the *Action Paper Boost the Productivity and Regeneration of Natural Resources* written with Harper Adams University, and our series of Monthly Calls.



We released **seven new publications**, including: an exclusive case-study surveying the strategy and vision behind the Birmingham Innovation Precinct, an innovative project to build a globally relevant hub for science, technology, and enterprise; a groundbreaking Call to Action to help stakeholders in advancing competitiveness in a period of turbulence and fast-change; and an Action Paper exploring key trends in natural resources management and strategies to boost productivity without harming the planet.

6  
Continents  
covered

43  
Community  
members

15  
Events  
hosted

70  
Total  
Fellows

7  
Case-studies  
published

11  
Blogs  
published

Our global footprint spans over three dozen countries in **six continents**, amounting to **43 members** and **70 fellows**.

We executed, co-hosted, and participated in events on the ground in **Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Romania, and the United States**.



Our Competitive Edge blog moved to the GFCC website to expand its impact and reach. In 2025, we **published 11 pieces** on various issues impacting global and regional competitiveness, including how AI is reshaping societies and economies, Pittsburgh's transformation into a hub of health innovation, the impact of critical minerals on the global economy, and strategies to build smart infrastructure, among other topics. Visit [our blog](#) to have access to this relevant and exclusive content.

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# Members & Fellows' updates

## About our new members:

In 2025, we continued to expand and diversify our intellectual and geographical footprint, which now includes 43 members spanning 20 nations. In addition, our fellows come from 24 countries. Our total global footprint amounts to three dozen countries across six continents.

This outstanding group of individuals and organizations represents a remarkable blend of economic, cultural, and organizational diversity.

### Our new members:

Adelaide University

The Albanian Council on Competitiveness and Innovation

The Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia



## Adelaide University

Adelaide University is one of the five largest universities in Australia. It builds on the legacy of University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide with an ambition of combining the strengths of both institutions to unlock a new for-purpose university focused on impact.

The University of Adelaide, which joined the GFCC in 2025, was founded in 1874 and built a history of more than 150 years of research excellence with a legacy of groundbreaking innovations.

Its researchers have contributed to the invention of X-ray crystallography, insulin, penicillin, and the Olympic torch. It has also played leading roles in discoveries such as gravitational waves, the Higgs boson particle, and the identification of a celestial source of high-energy neutrinos.

Established in 1991, the University of South Australia has a modern legacy and was known as Australia's University of Enterprise. It was the first Australian university to articulate graduate qualities in curriculum, the first university in the world to implement Innovation Jam™ technology to distil a crowdsourcing strategy spanning 56 countries; and Australia's first tertiary provider of aviation education.

Adelaide University will build on the history of both institutions to innovate. It has already been selected in more than one of NASA's Artemis III lunar science missions with the primary aim of putting the first woman and the first person of color on the moon; and it was selected as the first operator of the new Australian Defense Technologies Academy.



NEW MEMBER

## **The Albanian Council on Competitiveness and Innovation**

Led by Mr. Lulzim Basha, Chairman of the Democratic Party of Albanian and Mr. Erion Isufi, CEO of Landmark Technologies, ACCI unites leaders from Albanian businesses, universities, the public sector and global representatives to advance competitiveness and innovation and improve the ease of doing business in the country.

NEW MEMBER

## **The Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia**

The Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia (MISA) plays a central role in advancing the Kingdom's transformation under Vision 2030. Its mission is to develop a reliable, robust, and business-friendly investment ecosystem that attracts and retains both domestic and international investors.

MISA works across government to ensure seamless support throughout the investment journey, helping businesses access the Kingdom's rapidly expanding opportunities across vital and emerging sectors.

As the agency responsible for regulating, developing, and promoting investment, MISA safeguards investor rights while fostering an environment that enables private-sector growth—one of Vision 2030's core objectives. It also supports Saudi companies expanding abroad, contributing to a diversified and globally competitive national economy.

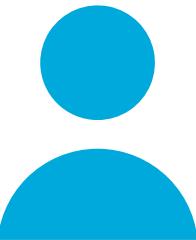
## About our new fellows:

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

### Our new fellows:

The Honorable Arthur Sinodinos AO

The Honorable John Anderson AC



NEW FELLOW

### The Honorable Arthur Sinodinos AO

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.

Ambassador Sinodinos started his career in the Australian government in 1979, rising to the Senior Executive Service in the Department of the Treasury. On the election of John Howard as Prime Minister of Australia in 1996, he was appointed his Senior Economic Adviser. In 1997, he was assigned Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, a position he held for nine years.

He also served as Australia's Minister for Industry, Innovation, and Science and as Senator for New South Wales in the Australian Parliament from 2011 to 2019. During his parliamentary career, he held key roles in and outside Cabinet, including Cabinet Secretary and Assistant Treasurer.

In addition to his leadership role in the public sector, Ambassador Sinodinos held numerous corporate appointments. He worked for Goldman Sachs, JBWere, and the National Australia Bank, and is now Partner and Chair of the Asia Group's Australia Practice.

## 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.

From 1996 to 2005, during the government of Prime Minister John Howard, Mr. Anderson served as the Leader of the National Party and as Deputy Prime Minister. In this period, the Liberal–National coalition achieved significant socio-economic progress for the Australian people.

With Mr. Anderson playing a key role, the coalition focused on budget repair and tax modernization. As a result, Australia achieved an average annual GDP growth rate of 3.6%, regained its AAA credit rating, and saw average household income double between 1994–95 and 2007–08. The economy generated two million new jobs, and the number of apprentices in training more than doubled.

Mr. Anderson also led reform in the transportation sector through Auslink and in the National Water Initiative, along with advancing other social and economic outcomes for Australia.

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# Monthly Calls

## Monthly Calls

We continued welcoming GFCC members and fellows to our exclusive Monthly Calls. These recurring online meetings serve as a platform for our community to review global developments, share updates, and access exclusive content in a trustworthy environment, bringing the knowledge and expertise in our network to the forefront.



**The Monthly Calls happen online every second Tuesday of the month (8:30 AM & 6:30 PM - Eastern Time) in two different time slots to allow participants across time zones to join the call at their convenience.**

Every month, one of our members or fellows presents on a relevant topic in the competitiveness agenda. In 2025, our calls included presentations and discussions on:

- Developing Perspectives for S&T and Competitiveness in Africa
- Innovation from Crisis in Greece: From Populism to New Growth Paradigm
- Innovation in Brazil: Priorities for the Manufacturing Sector
- Future Economic Prospects for Africa: The Path to Realizing Africa's Growth Potential
- The Making of a Global Tech and Innovation Hub in Auckland, New Zealand
- Understanding Lisbon's Rise on the Global Tech Stage
- The Role of Critical Minerals in Energy Transition and Economic Transformation
- *Forging the Future: Pittsburgh, Pitt and the Innovation Ecosystem - Health, AI and Tech on Regional and Global Impact*
- Investing in the Future: FDI Opportunities in Saudi Arabia
- The Competitiveness Landscape in Bulgaria
- COP 30 Highlights: Key Updates From the Climate Front

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# 2025 Highlights

# Annual Meeting

GFCC members and fellows convened on October 19 in Pittsburgh to review the organization's state of affairs, reflect on ongoing initiatives, and shape priorities for the future. The meeting marked 15 years of the GFCC at a moment when its mission to advance innovation, competitiveness, and shared prosperity through collaboration has never been more essential.

During the session, members and fellows participated in a pioneering working session designed to advance the implementation of the strategies outlined in the *2025 Call to Action: Advancing Competitiveness in a Turbulent and Fast-Changing World*



GFCC members and fellows at the 2025 Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh.

Participants broke into subgroups to share insights from their countries, regions, companies, and universities. The discussions focused on identifying key challenges, prioritizing recommendations from the Call to Action, and developing ideas for a forward-looking action agenda.

This productive exchange generated a set of initial directions and led to the establishment of two global task forces.

## **Task Force One: Building Human Advantage in the AI Economy**

*Building Human Advantage in the AI Economy*, chaired by Professor Aleks Subic, Vice-Chancellor and CEO of Aston University, will examine how to strengthen capabilities that empower humanity in the age of AI. The group will assess policy, education, skills, and ethics as drivers of innovation, inclusion, and long-term prosperity.

## **Task Force Two: Leveling the Playing Field through Competitiveness**

*Leveling the Playing Field through Competitiveness*, led by Professor Ken Sloan, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, and Dr. Hippolyte Fofack, former Chief Economist of Afreximbank and GFCC Distinguished Fellow, will work to systematize and disseminate global best practices in innovation and competitiveness. A key goal is to support emerging economies and regions by bridging gaps and forging new connections across the North-South and East-West.

Together, these collective efforts reinforce the GFCC's commitment to shaping a more innovative, equitable, and prosperous global future.



GFCC members and fellows working on an Action Agenda stemming from the 2025 Call to Action Advancing Competitiveness in a Turbulent and Fast-Changing World, during the Annual Meeting, in Pittsburgh, U.S.

# Forging the Future: The Intersection of Health, AI, and Tech

*Forging the Future: The Intersection of Health, AI and Tech*, held in Pittsburgh, on October 19-21, brought together over 300 participants from 20 countries. The two-day agenda focused on exploring the transformative technologies reshaping health care, competitiveness, and the global innovation economy – especially across artificial intelligence, advanced computing and the biomedical sciences.

Hosted by the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University, *Forging the Future* marked the first joint edition of the GFCC Global Innovation Summit and the Council on Competitiveness' Conversations Across America.



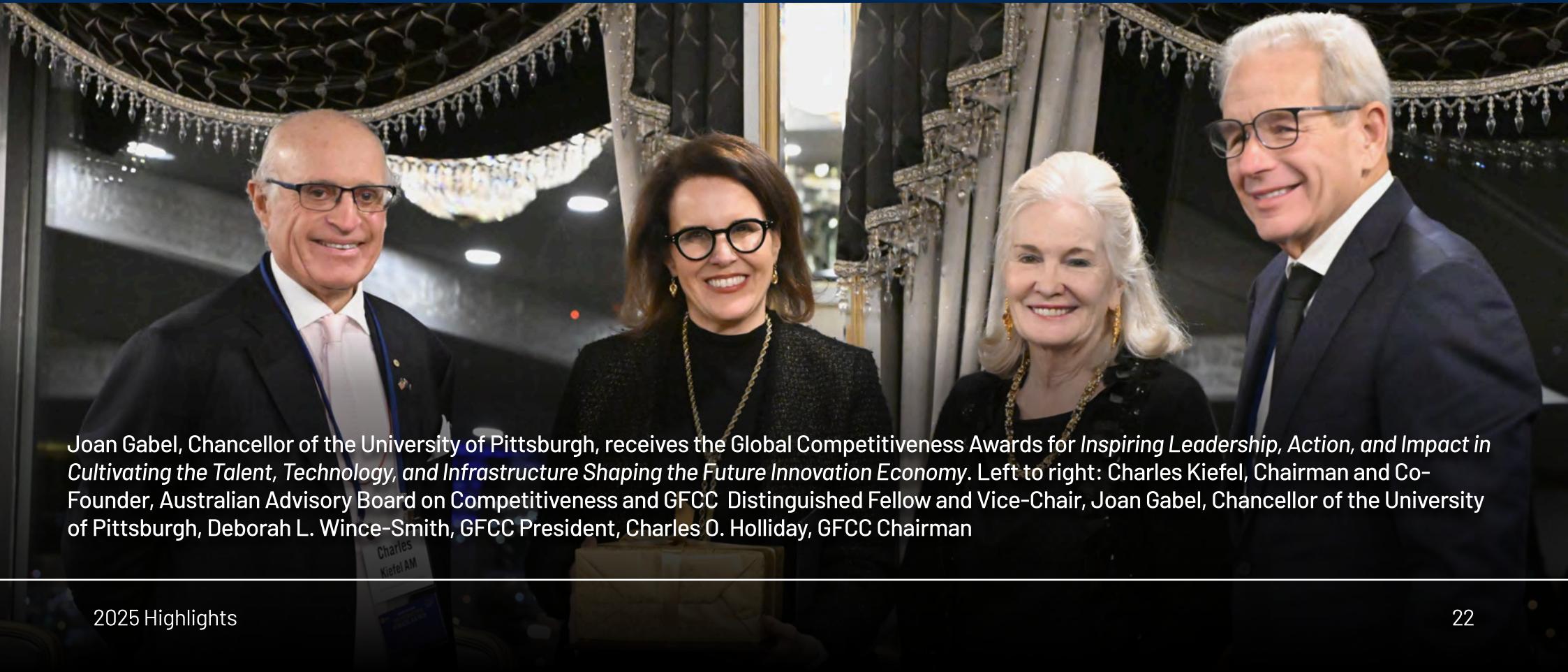
Participants had the opportunity to learn first-hand from global voices that are shaping the health, AI and tech sectors at every level – from elected officials to regional leaders and academic institutions as well as industry powerhouses. Among the esteemed speakers were Pennsylvania's Governor Josh Shapiro and U.S. Senators Dave McCormick and John Fetterman.

Panelists discussed a series of issues impacting competitiveness, including health-tech trends, strategies to advance place-making innovation and the pathway to build sustainable advanced manufacturing.

# Global Competitiveness Awards

The Global Competitiveness Awards celebrates individuals all over the world who have found ways to step forward to help lead their countries, communities, and citizens through major economic, technological, and industrial transitions.

Ultimately, these energetic doers, builders and agents of change have been fundamental to building a sustainable pathway that brings higher levels of competitiveness and greater opportunities.



Joan Gabel, Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, receives the Global Competitiveness Awards for *Inspiring Leadership, Action, and Impact in Cultivating the Talent, Technology, and Infrastructure Shaping the Future Innovation Economy*. Left to right: Charles Kiefel, Chairman and Co-Founder, Australian Advisory Board on Competitiveness and GFCC Distinguished Fellow and Vice-Chair, Joan Gabel, Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, Deborah L. Wince-Smith, GFCC President, Charles O. Holliday, GFCC Chairman

This year, during *Forging the Future: The Intersection of Health, AI and Tech*, in Pittsburgh, the GFCC bestowed four special awards.

**Joan Gabel**, Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh and the first woman to lead the institution since its founding, received an award for her *Inspiring Leadership, Action, and Impact in Cultivating the Talent, Technology, and Infrastructure Shaping the Future Innovation Economy*.

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

During the gathering, the GFCC presented the Global Competitiveness Awards to **four distinguished leaders**, recognizing their exceptional contributions to advancing competitiveness and innovation within their communities, regions, and nations.





Dr. Mehmood Khan, CEO of the Hevolution Foundation, receives the award for *Visionary Leadership in Advancing Global Health Research and Innovation*.

Dr. Mehmood Khan, CEO of the Hevolution Foundation, received the award in recognition of his *Visionary Leadership in Advancing Global Health Research and Innovation*. Dr. Khan's remarkable journey began in medicine, but he took multiple leadership roles at multinational corporations that transformed how these organizations approached science, innovation, and human well-being.

Today, as CEO of the Hevolution Foundation, Dr. Khan leads the world's largest philanthropic funder of healthspan science – a fundamental wording he has crafted.



Dr. Harris Pastides, President Emeritus of the University of South Carolina, received the award for *Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation*.

Dr. Harris Pastides, President Emeritus of the University of South Carolina, 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.

Under his leadership, the South Carolina Honors College became the number one public honors college in the United States, and dozens of programs achieved national distinction. But his greatest legacy lies in his championing of access, affordability, and innovation in education.



Dr. Harris Pastides, President Emeritus of the University of South Carolina, received the award for *Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation*.

Finally, Prof. Farnam Jahanian, President of Carnegie Mellon University, received the award for *Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation*.

At CMU, he has overseen extraordinary growth in research, attracting more than \$600 million annually, and has led the most ambitious campus transformation in the university's history – a billion-dollar investment in facilities and research infrastructure. He has also spearheaded the most successful fundraising campaign in CMU's history, raising more than \$2.5 billion.



**The Global Competitiveness Awards recognizes leaders across countries who have transformed businesses, government structures, and policymaking to promote sustainability, innovation, growth, and prosperity for all of their citizens since 2016.**

# Leadership in Place-making Innovation

We continued to advance the URLF Leadership in Place-Making Initiative, which explores the dynamic interplay between university-driven innovation and strategic place-making.

**Launched in 2024 and led by Professor Aleks Subic, the initiative promotes multiple activities and exchanges between GFCC university members and stakeholders from government, industry, and local communities.**



GFCC leaders gather in Lisbon to explore the local innovation ecosystem and exchange with peers.

The goal is to examine how universities can fuel innovation to reshape economies and strengthen communities, while generating practical insights and essential toolkits to advance place-based and place-making innovation.

The effort began with a meeting in Birmingham that led to the signing of a MOU between the GFCC and four member universities: Aston University, Queen's University Belfast, Universiti Teknologi Petronas, and the University of California San Diego.

The agreement established the foundation for a Global Center for Innovation Leadership (GLEP), which will start to produce new knowledge and train future leaders in place-making innovation with plans to deliver its first executive program in 2026-2027.

Additionally, this year, the GFCC produced a series of publications stemming from this URLF initiative, including: a concept paper on place-making innovation; a case study on the Birmingham Innovation Project; and a report summarizing insights from the initial meeting in Birmingham.

**The initiative has continued to grow through study trips and direct engagement with innovation hubs, including a 2025 visit to Lisbon hosted by the Catholic University of Portugal.**

This study trip will be combined with the San Diego edition of the Competitiveness Conversation Across America by the Council on Competitiveness, on July 20-21, creating a unique opportunity for GFCC leaders to get first-hand access to key developments in the U.S. innovation domain.

We will continue with multiple activities to deepen our understanding of how universities can be true catalysts of transformation in their regions.

In 2026, the GFCC will continue its series of study trips to university-anchored innovation ecosystems. The Chancellor of the University of California San Diego (UCSD), Prof. Pradeep Khosla, will host GFCC leaders on July 22-23.

# Delphi Economic Forum

Building on a long-standing partnership, The GFCC convened a high-level panel to explore the power of collaborations and the importance of working together to advance frontiers of economic prosperity, national security, and the overall well-being of the world at the 10th edition of the Delphi Economic Forum (DEF), held between April 9–12, in Greece.

This special anniversary edition of the Forum invited participants to reflect on a decade of profound transformation –driven by technological advancement and the disruption of traditional systems of work, production, and social interaction.



GFCC President Deborah L. Wince-Smith speaks at the 10th edition of the Delphi Economic Forum in Greece.



Panelists underscored the urgent need to build multistakeholder partnerships that can respond to rapid technological change and evolving international dynamics.

Discussions also focused on how global trade policies and tariffs are reshaping the economic landscape, and how research universities can serve as conveners, bringing together governments, industry, and civil society, to advance innovation.



GFCC leaders discuss strategies to advance global collaboration and the frontiers of global prosperity, during the DEF 2025, in Greece.

# Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum

The GFCC joined a timely conversation on ways to secure economic prosperity in the midst of a global polycrisis, in partnership with the New Strategy Center during the Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum held in Bucharest, Romania, on May 22 and 23.

GFCC President Deborah L. Wince-Smith moderated the session featuring Lulzim Basha, political leader and former Mayor of Tirana; Igor Burakovsky, Head of the Board at the Ukraine's Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting; Dr. Hippolyte Fofack, Research Associate at Harvard University; and Kalin Peshov, Chairman of Glavbolgarstroy Holding.

The discussion explored how leaders can navigate turbulent environments and the value of platforms such as the GFCC in accelerating decision-making. Panelists also highlighted the importance of communication strategies that help guide constituents through periods of crisis and examined emerging trends shaping global finance, research and development, and government spending.



GFCC leaders talk about ways to secure economic prosperity in the face of a polycrisis during the Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum, in Bucharest, Romania.

# URLF Study Trip to Lisbon



The GFCC Community travelled to Lisbon in July for an immersive experience into the city's dynamic academic and entrepreneurial landscape. The trip, hosted by Catholic University of Portugal, included visits to innovation sites, such as AI Hub, 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*.

GFCC leaders had a chance to explore the local innovation ecosystem and exchange with local leaders during the study trip hosted by Catholic University of Portugal.

The program was designed to foster a conversational atmosphere, encourage rich knowledge exchange, and provide an insider view into what is happening in Lisbon, a city that has gone through a profound transformation in the past 10 years and has become a magnet for innovators across the world. Participants engaged in high-level discussions about the local innovation ecosystem and strategies to drive place-making innovation.

The trip was part of the URLF initiative to foster Leadership in Place-making Innovation, which focuses on universities as catalysts of social change and economic transformation of the regions and communities they serve.

The agenda also included participation in the ceremony during which former Chancellor Angela Merkel received a degree of Doctor Honoris Causa from the Catholic University of Portugal.

The Lisbon study trip provided an extraordinary platform for leaders to collaborate on rethinking the future of higher education for impact.



GFCC leaders visit the Champalimaud Foundation during the Lisbon Study Trip.

# Launch of the Bulgarian Advisory Council on Competitiveness (BACC)

The GFCC has been fostering global best practices for advancing innovation and competitiveness at local, regional, and national levels since its foundation in 2010. At the core of its mission, it is the idea that councils on competitiveness operating as multi-sector bodies can help to accelerate growth and prosperity globally.



The GFCC was a key partner in the founding of the Bulgarian Advisory Council on Competitiveness (BACC) in 2025.

This year, the GFCC was a key partner in the founding of the Bulgarian Advisory Council on Competitiveness (BACC) in Sofia. GFCC President Deborah L. Wince-Smith travelled to Bulgaria in May to inaugurate the BACC.

This first-of-its-kind institution in the country was designed to serve as an independent platform for research and knowledge-sharing activities, and it drew inspiration for its mission, structure, and initiatives from the work of the GFCC.

On occasion, Wince-Smith signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the GFCC and the newly established council, formalizing a shared commitment to align activities, collaborate to amplify collective impact.



GFCC President Deborah L. Wince Smith signs a MoU between the GFCC and the newly established council, formalizing a shared commitment to align activities and collaborate.

The GFCC and BACC will work together to advance innovation and competitiveness through multiple work streams:

- Knowledge-sharing activities, such as the exchange of reports, studies, best practices, and strategic insights;
- Capacity building, through training programs, expert exchanges, and executive education initiatives;
- Joint programs and events, by co-hosting conferences, forums, seminars, workshops, and webinars, in Bulgaria and internationally;
- Policy development, collaborating on public policy recommendations, white papers, and frameworks that advance innovation and competitiveness agendas.

**Following the development of the BACC, GBS will host the 2026 Global Innovation Summit in Sofia in the second semester of 2026.**

# Resilient Infrastructures for the Future

Societies must learn to deal with an increasingly volatile world due to the impacts of climate change, cyber threats, and aging systems. In this context, harnessing strategies for designing, implementing, running, and improving the infrastructures that are essential to modern life becomes a priority for organizations and leaders worldwide.

The GFCC in partnership with Lockheed Martin Corporation (LMCO) explored this topic in detail during Resilient Infrastructures for the Future, a two-part online series with leading experts focused on building resilience of critical physical and digital infrastructures.

The first session ***Securing Digital Infrastructures Against Cyber Threats and Technological Failures*** surveyed ways of safeguarding critical systems against increasing digital crimes that put businesses, governments and citizens at risk.

Amy Parde, Director of Resilience at Lockheed Martin, and James Tsoliis, CEO & Managing Director at Netlinkz, contributed to the discussions, sharing their experiences and tested strategies to prevent failures. They also commented on the resilient mechanisms in place to deal with eventual breaches at their respective organizations.

The second session ***Building Resilient Physical Infrastructures in the Age of Extreme Weather Events*** discussed two distinct cases of innovative design systems that helped reduce the impacts of extreme weather conditions and improve the usage and efficiency of natural resources in the United States and Australia.

Ben-Paul Gilmore, Fellow at Lockheed Martin Aeronautics, and Sebastian Pfautsch, Professor of Urban Planning and Management at Western Sydney University participated in the discussions.

# Horasis Global Summit São Paulo

The 10th Horasis Global Summit took place in São Paulo, Brazil, on October 7-9. The event opened with a high-energy evening session that framed three days of dialogue on cooperation, competitiveness, and global progress. The city of São Paulo, Brazil's cultural and economic heart and one of the ten largest metropolitan areas in the world, offered an ideal setting to discussions.

At the Opening Reception Dinner, participants learned new perspectives on urban performance, sustainable growth, and international collaboration. They also gained insights into the SuperSymmetry Institute and the forthcoming Global South Cities Competitiveness Index.

Among the leaders speaking at the opening session was GFCC Executive Director Roberto Alvarez, who shared a strategic perspective on global competitiveness, the future of cooperation, and the essential role of cities as engines of innovation and economic transformation.

He was joined by Vahan Agopyan, State Secretary for Science, Technology and Innovation of São Paulo; Angela Gandra, Secretary of International Relations for the City of São Paulo; Anastasia Kalinina, Founder of the SuperSymmetry Institute; GFCC Distinguished Fellow Jerry Hultin; and Horasis Chairman Frank-Jürgen Richter. Together, they connected São Paulo's global relevance with a broader call for collaboration.

Over the following days, more than 1,000 leaders from 50 countries examined how cooperation can strengthen economies and societies amid technological disruption, geopolitical tension, and climate risk. The GFCC participated in multiple activities and sessions throughout the program, with Alvarez moderating a roundtable on multinational accords, economic growth and competitiveness.

# Brasilia IT+

Brasilia IT+ is one of the largest digital-technology and innovation event in Brazil held in Brasilia (the country's capital). It brings together leaders from government, industry and academia to explore the future of digital services, IT systems, and digital transformation.

In Brasilia, IT-related activities are the fastest-growing industry vertical, and this year's edition of Brasilia IT+ brought together about 3,000 participants, including corporate and government leaders, startups, policymakers, investors, and researchers to explore trends in the sector.



GFCC President Deborah L. Wince-Smith speaks in the main headline session at the Brasilia IT+, in Brazil.

GFCC President Deborah Wince-Smith spoke in the main headline session, adding a global competitiveness dimension to the discussions. Drawing on lessons from the GFCC's work across over three dozen countries, she shared insights on how regions can strengthen innovation ecosystems, build talent, scale technology-driven industries, and connect local capabilities with global opportunities. Her remarks emphasized the importance of cross-sector collaboration, clear strategic vision, and international partnerships to accelerate innovation and long-term economic dynamism.

Wince-Smith also highlighted practical lessons from the GFCC network. For instance, she commented about places around the world that have advanced competitiveness through coordinated leadership and investment in skills and technology, and advocated for strong engagement between universities, companies, and public institutions.

Her contribution reinforced the value of global networks like the GFCC in helping regions advance innovation, build capacity, and align local opportunities with global trends. She made the case for the Federal District of Brazil to further engage with the GFCC.

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# 2025 Publications



# Defining Place-making Innovation and The Central Role of Universities in Regional Transformation

Place-making innovation seeks to establish a comprehensive and proactive approach to foster long-term socio-economic transformation by leveraging the strengths and qualities of a place. It also highlights the key role of universities as catalysts of inclusive innovation in their regions, working together with local and regional stakeholders.

In a unique concept paper, the GFCC provides compelling reasons for stakeholders to pursue this critical approach and establishes a clear definition of place-making innovation.

Beyond that, the document offers a strategic guide with key steps to begin fostering place-making innovation at local and regional levels, highlighting essential elements such as investments in strategic assets, the need to build multistakeholder coalitions, and a focus on community impact, among others.



[Read the Concept Paper](#)



# Birmingham Innovation Precinct: A Case of University-Led Transformation Through Place-Based Innovation (also available as executive summary)

The Birmingham Innovation Precinct (BIP) represents a significant and ambitious undertaking aimed at establishing a globally relevant hub for science, technology, and enterprise in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

In an exclusive case-study, the GFCC examines the strategy and the vision behind this multi-stakeholder initiative led by GFCC member Aston University, comments on the key players involved, and reviews decisive moments in project development, from idea conception to turning it into reality.

Strategically located in a geographic area adjacent to the university, the BIP builds upon Aston's research strengths and strategic vision. The case-study explores in detail the motivations, stakeholder collaboration, and the university's leadership role in the initiative.



Combining original research with insights gathered during a GFCC's URLF study trip to Birmingham and the Leadership Dialogue held at Aston in November 2024, the document serves as a blueprint for universities seeking to build innovation ecosystems around the world and as inspiration for university leaders and stakeholders across sectors to collaborate in transforming local and regional realities.



[Read the Case-Study](#)



[Download the Executive Summary](#)

# Reimagining Higher Education for University 4.0: A Unified Agenda for Funding, Ranking, and Regional Development

In an exclusive paper for the GFCC, Prof. Aleks Subic calls for a new paradigm to rank and fund universities, centered on their capacity to drive socio-economic transformation.

Prof. Subic introduces the concept of University 4.0, positioning universities as civic anchors that integrate teaching and research with place-based innovation, social equity, and long-term sustainable development.

For him, current global ranking frameworks are outdated for still prioritizing exclusively academic outputs, often overlooking the broader economic and societal impact that universities generate.

Building on the University 4.0 concept, he examines university models around the world that effectively embody socio-impact as core principles.



[Read the Paper](#)



# 2025 Call to Action – Advancing Competitiveness in a Turbulent and Fast-Changing World

Technology is evolving rapidly, but just as critically, the global system is in flux. Uncertainty now defines the geopolitical, economic, and technological landscape.

In this shifting environment, a focus on competitiveness is no longer optional – it is a fundamental need. It can help local and national economies further expand their ability to create value, better manage costs and prepare to secure access to markets, resources, talent and capital.

The *2025 Call to Action: Advancing Competitiveness in a Turbulent and Fast-Changing World* presents ten critical recommendations to enable leaders across the world to advance competitiveness and make their countries, regions and cities more prosperous and resilient.

The document draws on 15 years of work connecting business, government and academia to foster win-win solutions in multiple issues impacting competitiveness.



From unlocking human potential, co-investing in future industries, and launching transformational projects to rebuilding manufacturing capacity, among other topics, the Call to Action serves as a dynamic guide to future-proof competitiveness strategies.

## Recommendations from the 2025 Call to Action

1. Invest in innovation to create new value and move up the economic ladder.
2. Reinforce the foundations for innovation and economic efficiency.
3. Think and act globally to raise the bar for innovation and competitiveness.
4. Rebuild manufacturing capacity to boost resilience and drive innovation.
5. Unlock human potential by building talent at scale.
6. Build future-enabling infrastructures – physical, digital, and institutional.
7. Overhaul health systems to unlock value and enable prosperity.
8. Be bold: Launch transformational projects that mobilize entire systems.
9. Co-invest in future industries that solve global challenges.
10. Focus on impact on the ground and build from existing strengths.



[Read the Call to Action](#)

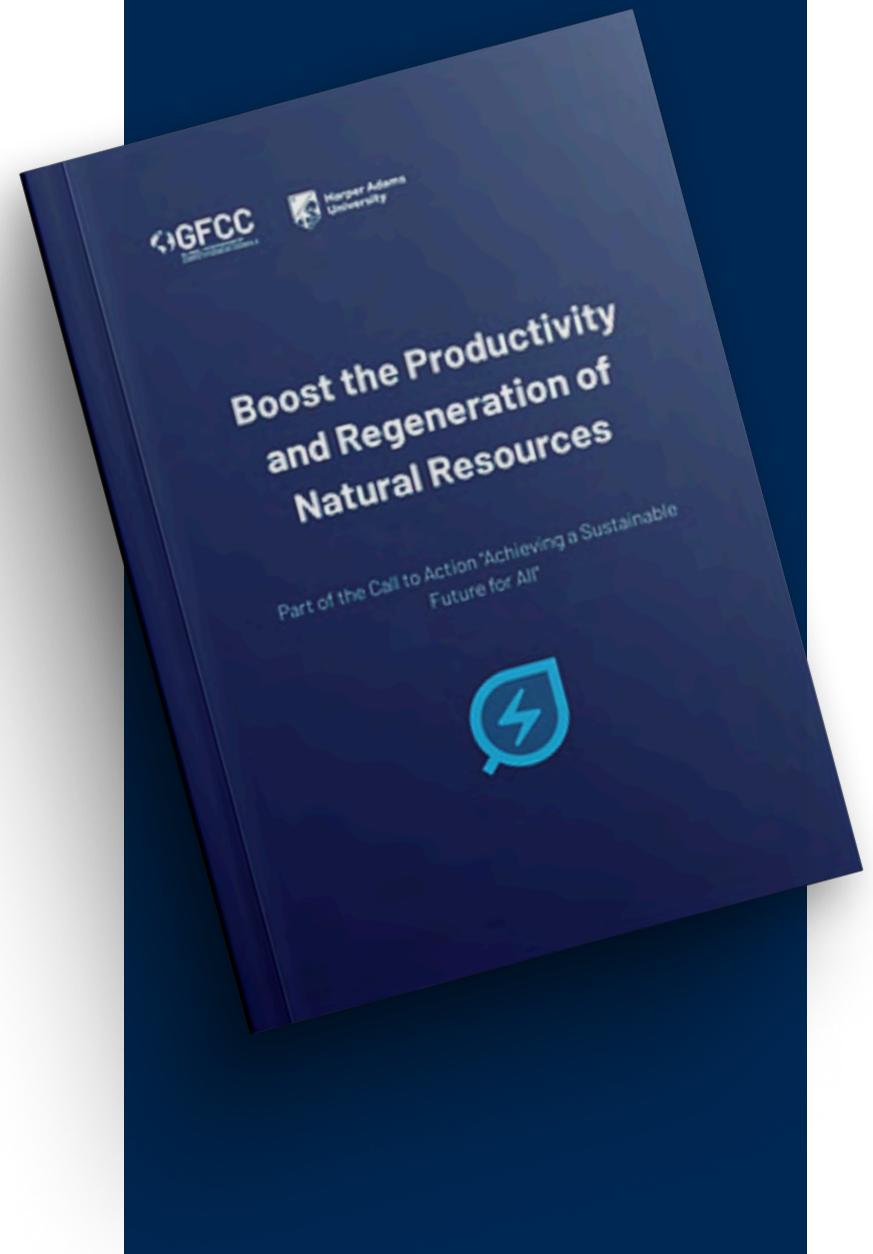
# Action Paper: Boost the Productivity and Regeneration of Natural Resources

Natural resources remain essential to long-term economic sustainability and central to emerging economic models but is increasingly clear that they can no longer be treated as inexhaustible commodities.

Around the world, leaders across sectors are confronting the intertwined challenges of boosting natural-resource productivity while protecting the environment.

The GFCC, in partnership with Harper Adams University—a leading institution in technology innovation, agriculture, food production, and animal sciences—developed the Action Paper: Boost the Productivity and Regeneration of Natural Resources with practical strategies to address these issues.

The publication, stemming from the 2024 Call to Action—Achieving a Sustainable Future for All, provides a structured set of approaches to guide investments that enhance productivity while advancing environmental stewardship.



The paper draws a picture of the current natural resource landscape, highlighting a set of opportunities related to sustainable natural resource management. It also outlines seven key strategies and associated recommendations designed to support policymakers, industry leaders, and community stakeholders:

- Community Engagement
- Responsible Innovation
- Technology-Driven Efficiency
- Transparent Monitoring and Stakeholder Engagement
- Equitable Benefit Sharing
- Sustainable Green Technology Transfer
- Regeneration Economy

In addition to these strategic pillars, the publication highlights innovative technologies, actionable tools, and international case studies that illustrate how resource productivity can be increased without compromising environmental integrity.

Together, these insights aim to equip leaders with the frameworks needed to shape sustainable, resilient, and future-ready natural resource systems.

Following up with the paper launch, the GFCC hosted a webinar moderated by GFCC Chairman Chad Holliday, with Prof. Ken Sloan, Vice-Chancellor and CEO, Harper Adams University, Daniel Litvin, Founder and CEO of Resource Resolutions.

Together, they reviewed main insights from the paper and explored ways to navigate the tension between resource scarcity and the vast possibilities that innovation can unlock.



[Download the Paper](#)

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Looking Ahead

# Looking Ahead

After an outstanding year marking the celebration of GFCC's 15th anniversary, the development of important partnerships and a renewed determination on the strength of our mission, we are ready to start building new bold initiatives and strategies with our community to accelerate innovation and competitiveness.

In 2026, we will continue to expand GFCC's leadership role by:

**1 Relaunching the GFCC Fellowship Program:**

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.

**2 Curating and leading new URLF study trips:**

We are looking forward to meet again with colleagues on July 20-23, in San Diego, for a study trip to the local innovation ecosystem combined with a special edition of the Competitiveness Conversation Across America by the Council on Competitiveness.

**3 Launching the Global Leadership Excellence Programme (GLEP):**

Working with partner universities, the GFCC will launch a unique executive education program that combines the strengths of each institution and blend cutting-edge academic content with hands-on leadership development, and real-world practice .

**4 Implementing the two task forces launched during Forging the Future:**

Task Force one Building Human Advantage in the AI Economy and Task Force Two - Leveling the Playing Field through Competitiveness, to advance the implementation of the strategic guidance set out in the 2025 Call to Action.



Finally, we are delighted to confirm that the **2026 Annual Meeting** and Global Innovation Summit will take place in **Sofia, Bulgaria**, in the second semester.

The next 15 years will demand greater ambition than the 15 we just traversed. We will redouble efforts to expand our network, advance thought leadership, and deepen our impact.

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, growth, resilience, and shared prosperity for the next 15!

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The GFCC

# About the GFCC

The GFCC is a multistakeholder membership organization with universities, corporations, government agencies, and an extended network of fellows in more than 38 countries. For more information about GFCC initiatives, [visit our website](#).



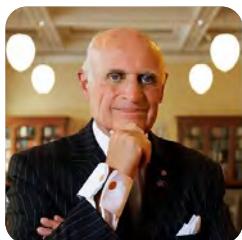
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Chairman



**George Handjinicolaou**  
Chairman, Piraeus Bank



**Deborah L. Wince-Smith**  
Founder & President  
Founder & President, Council  
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**Charles Kiefel AM**  
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**Isabel Capeloa Gil**  
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University  
of Portugal (UCP)



**Roberto Alvarez**  
Secretary to the Board  
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Australian Advisory Board on Competitiveness  
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The Principals Funds Management PTY LTD  
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Brazilian National Confederation of Industries (CNI)

## Bulgaria

Glavbolgarstroy Holding AD

## Canada

Sandra Duxbury

## Greece

Council on Competitiveness of Greece—CompeteGR  
Delphi Economic Forum  
Piraeus Bank

## Japan

Japan Science and Technology Agency  
Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI)

## Kazakhstan

Center for Research & Consulting LLC  
Kazakhstan Growth Forum

## Lebanon

American University of Beirut

## Malaysia

Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT)  
Universiti Teknologi Petronas

## New Zealand

Auckland University of Technology  
University of Auckland

## Oman

National Competitiveness Office

## Portugal

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

## Romania

Bucharest University of Economic Studies

## Saudi Arabia

Ministry of Investment for Saudi Arabia (MISA)

## UK

Centre for Competitiveness  
Aston University  
Harper Adams University  
Queen's University Belfast

## Ukraine

Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman

## USA

Academy of Art University  
Arizona State University  
Council on Competitiveness  
Georgetown University  
Lockheed Martin Corporation  
University of Arizona  
University of California San Diego  
University of Illinois  
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## Zimbabwe

National Competitiveness Commission

# GFCC Fellows

## Distinguished Fellows

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Christos Megalou	<b>Senior Fellows</b>	Peter Smith
Peter Meyers	Edward D. Agne	Ted Zoller
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The Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) is a network that brings together leaders and organizations across sectors to amplify and accelerate competitiveness strategies and best practices worldwide, driving productivity, sustainable growth, security and prosperity for nations, regions, and communities.

The GFCC is a global membership organization founded in 2010. Our network is composed of members that pay yearly dues to secure their placement on the network and experts invited to participate as fellows.

Learn more about the GFCC at: [www.thegfcc.org](http://www.thegfcc.org)  
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# Join Our Global Community

Contact us to set up a call:

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🌐 [www.thegfcc.org](http://www.thegfcc.org)

