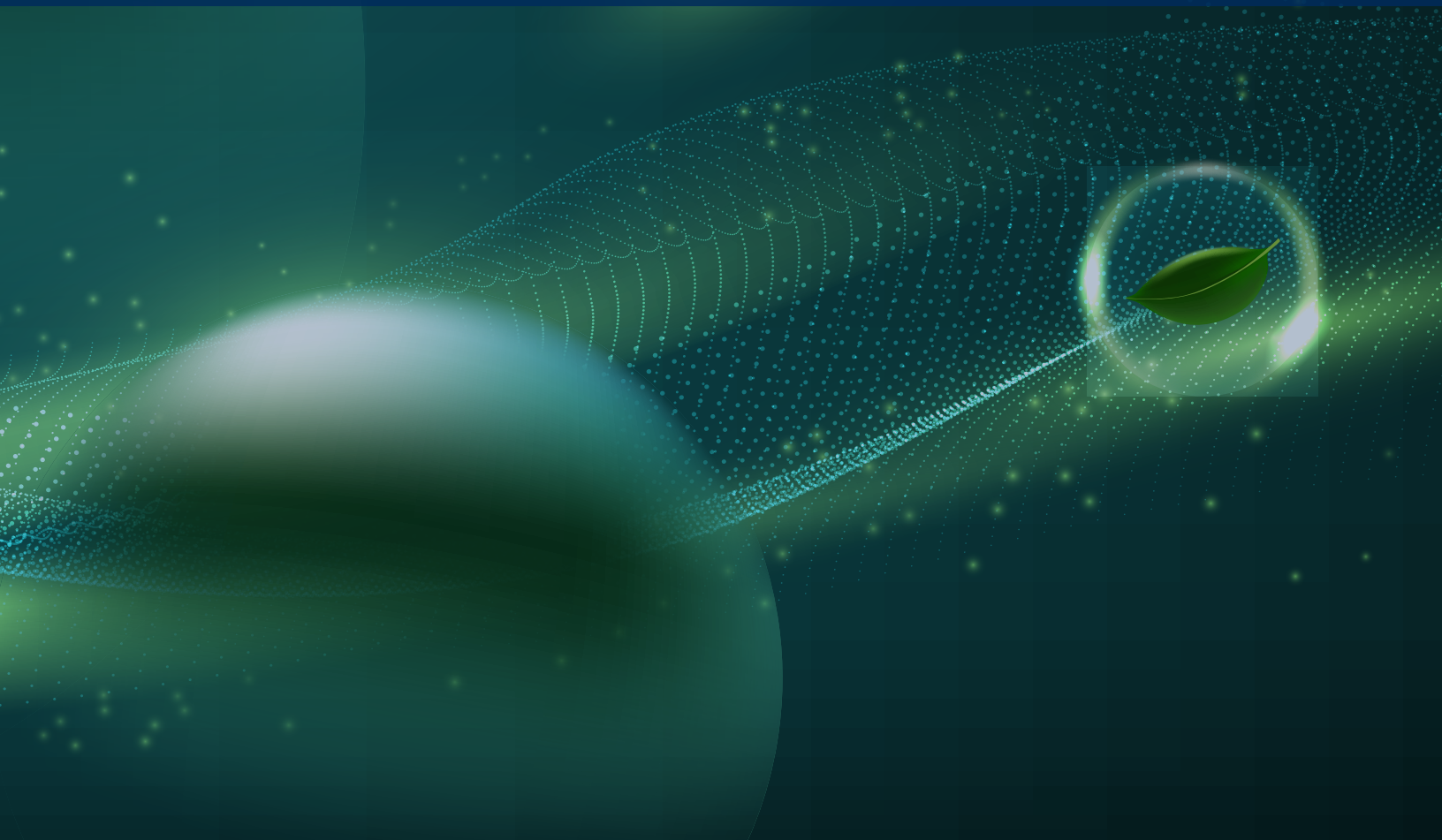


# Commit to a Sustainable Future

## 2024–2025 Annual Report



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Addressing systemic and structural barriers to broaden participation in the innovation economy has always been central to the GFCC agenda since its inception.

Our discussions consistently emphasize the need to maximize human potential by investing in skills development and integrating diverse geographies and demographics into strategic initiatives. These efforts not only foster more resilient and inclusive societies but also drive economic prosperity, leading to higher net growth rates and long-term sustainability.

At the same time, we have long advocated for framing sustainability as an opportunity for all stakeholders. We recognize the rise of a rapidly expanding market for clean industries, offering immense potential for innovation and investment. To fully harness this opportunity, businesses and policy-makers must develop new models, strategies, and best practices that align with the evolving demands of this emerging sector.

In 2024, we focused our agenda on connecting inclusiveness and sustainability using innovation as a lens to see what the future holds. We investigated the use of new technologies, strategies, and practices to drive a greener and more inclusive future.

Between November 11-15, we landed in Belfast, Northern Ireland, for the 2024 edition of our yearly Global Innovation Summit. Under the theme **Accelerating Global Competitiveness and Economic Inclusiveness**, we held a range of conversations, keynotes, and workshops addressing strategies to overcome perceived trade-offs between sustainability, technological progress, and inclusiveness.

At the GIS, we launched the *2024 Call to Action: Achieving a Sustainable Future for All*. This groundbreaking document offers recommendations to governments, universities, industry,

and civil society to frame sustainability and economic inclusiveness as an opportunity at all levels.

Co-created with insights and inputs from our members and fellows throughout the year, our *Call to Action* is more than just a framework. It is a catalyst for action, guiding competitiveness stakeholders in a transition from imagination and ideas to insight, ingenuity, invention, and impact.

We are proud of the extension and outreach of the GIS this year. In 2024, the Summit held its largest edition in history with over 850 participants from 30 countries. We are also extremely thankful to our hosts, Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) and the Centre for Competitiveness (CoC), for receiving our Community in their country and demonstrating support for our work and initiatives.

QUB and CoC have played a leadership role in the transformation of Northern Ireland, cultivating a thriving competitiveness movement through their work overtime with multiple stakeholders.



The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President, GFCC, and President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, speaks at Hillsborough Castle, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during GIS 2024.

In addition to an amazing exchange of ideas, best practices, and insights, the Belfast-based GIS provided a platform to review and advance partnerships across our membership. For example, continuing the cooperation catalyzed by the GFCC in 2023, Queen's University of Belfast and Aston University agreed to launch a dual Ph.D. program in 2025 focusing on health tech, sustainable manufacturing, and digital finance. This program will strengthen collaborative research and training between the two institutions and promote internships with industry partners.





Leaders from the GFCC Community participate in a panel hosted by Prof. Aleks Subic, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Aston University, during the *Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation* in Birmingham, UK.

In addition, at the end of the week before the GIS, the GFCC hosted with Aston University a crucial dialogue on the role of universities in driving place-making innovation. This *Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation* reunited GFCC leaders from Australia, Brazil, Greece, Japan, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as representants from

global corporations such as Amazon Web Services, in Birmingham, United Kingdom, on November 8.

This dialogue inaugurated a new phase of the GFCC's longstanding **University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF)** focusing on understanding high-performing university-anchored innovation ecosystems. In this new phase, we are pleased Professor Subic will chair the URLF. His mandate will include working with our university members to organize a



GFCC leaders and participants attend a panel session during the GIS 2024, in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

series of global study trips and leadership dialogues focusing on identifying best and “next” practices emerging in university-anchored innovation ecosystems.

Yet, in Birmingham, the GFCC signed an agreement with Aston University, the University of California San Diego, the Universiti Teknologi Petronas, and Queen's University Belfast, establishing the **Global Center for Innovation and Leadership**.

In the coming years, we will combine the strengths and expertise of our network with the academic know-how of these leading global universities to: advance knowledge on place-making innovation; deliver distinctive courses in areas such as innovation leadership, innovation policy, and innovation technologies; host study tours; and produce new-to-the-world thought leadership, like case studies focused on place-making innovation.

The execution of the Belfast-based GIS and the Birmingham-based Leadership Dialogue represented high points in 2024. But throughout the year, we were hands-on with GFCC members worldwide, participating in activities and fostering connections to advance collaboration across our membership.

In April, the GFCC partnered with the Delphi Economic Forum to produce a series of high-level, global panels focused on the state of competitiveness in Greece, in Europe, and around the world — with special attention paid to the role of public-private partnerships to advance economic, security, and innovation priorities.

In May, representing the GFCC and the Council on Competitiveness — along with the Council's Vice Chair for Academia, Professor Joan Gabel, the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh — I had the honor to help launch the Albanian Competitiveness and Innovation Council (ACIC).

In June, I was honored to deliver Aston University's Annual Charter Dinner keynote, focusing my remarks on the roles universities are playing in driving place-making innovation.

In October, I participated in the Rector's Strategic Advisory Board Meeting of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP) led by GFCC Board Member Dr. Isabel Capelo Gil, President of the university. The GFCC's Distinguished Fellow Ms. Athina Chatzipe-trou also serves as a member of the UCP Rector's Strategic Advisory Board and participated in the meeting.

Alongside this array of events and discussions with our GFCC membership, 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.

Finally, we are delighted that the 2025 GIS, co-hosted by the University of Pittsburgh in partnership with the Council, will return to the United States, between October 19 and 22.

This report invites you to learn more about our work and engage with us. I hope you enjoy the reading.



## Driving Global Competitiveness Through Win-Win Solutions

Our heartfelt belief in the power of win-win solutions, which set the foundation of the GFCC over 15 years ago, remains as steadfast as ever. Since 2010, the GFCC has become a global platform for stakeholders to connect and exchange best practices that drive productivity, economic growth, and prosperity.

Today, this mission is more critical than ever. Across the globe, leaders must navigate their nations through periods of turbulence and profound transformation. Technological advancements, the urgency of facing changes in the climate, emerging security and national challenges, and many other trends are converging to transform and rapidly shift the global competitiveness landscape.

With all these challenges in sight, every year the GFCC builds on the strengths of its global community to advance competitiveness and prosperity worldwide through collaboration and knowledge-sharing activities. The year 2024 was no different. We

### SIGNED BY



**Mr. Charles O. Holliday Jr.**  
Chairman , GFCC



**The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith**  
President, GFCC  
President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness

were on the ground with our members and fellows, catalyzing important partnerships and powering positive transformation across the globe.

The **Global Innovation Summit** held its largest edition in history, bringing together over 850 participants in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Experts from industry, government, business, and academia gathered in a collaborative, peer-to-peer environment to explore

solutions and innovative strategies for overcoming the perceived trade-offs between sustainability, technological progress, economic prosperity, and inclusiveness.

Discussions covered a range of themes impacting competitiveness: understanding better the challenges and opportunities emerging from AI and digitalization; mapping groundbreaking innovations driving the world's energy transition; exploring the critical role partnerships play in advancing food security; sharing new ideas on how best to design robust competitiveness strategies for nations and organizations navigating turbulent times; and more.

The GFCC took pains with our co-hosts to provide its members and stakeholder with a cutting-edge summit where participants could learn about all of these new trends, as well as connect, exchange ideas, identify opportunities, and collaborate. We set a very concrete goal: every leader in attendance should take home at least one critical insight they could apply locally in an effort to create more

prosperous societies. The GFCC is committed to fostering these interactions and will continue to do so.

Just prior to the GIS, GFCC members spent time in Birmingham, at Aston University, participating in a GFCC **University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF)** initiative, the *Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation*.

There, we hosted lively discussions with leaders from university, industry, government, and civil society organizations to identify the toolkits and key drivers of place-making innovation. During our meeting, the GFCC signed an agreement with a group of university members to establish the **Global Center for Innovation Leadership**. This Center will start activities in early 2025.

The mission of our global network remains timely and relevant. In 2024, we welcomed 11 new members and seven new fellows to our community. We also appointed a new Vice-Chair to the Board of Trustees, Mr. Charles

Kiefel AM from Australia, reinforcing our governance and bringing his energy, insight, and leadership to the core of our agenda.

In 2025, we aim to continue expanding our membership around the world, engaging and partnering with business, university, and government leaders in different nations, gathering different perspectives and information from diverse realities, to expand our impact.

As we publish this, we see daily reports of tensions between countries and situations that many are framing from a win-lose perspective. Our work together, grounded in a win-win approach, empowers the GFCC to leverage its diverse strengths, to achieve shared goals, and to advance global prosperity. We will continue with this approach. If you are not a part of our community, we hope this report inspires you to join us on this exciting, relevant journey.

## A Diverse Community Driving Competitiveness

The GFCC is not an ordinary network. It brings together leaders from industry, academia, government, civil society, and various types of organizations — diverse voices that don't always speak the same language but must engage in meaningful dialogue. In today's world, perhaps more than ever, it is critical to keep these conversations going, bridging nations and sectors.

This spirit was evident in Belfast, where 850 participants from 30 countries gathered for discussions that deliberately mixed sectors and perspectives. The GFCC is not about professionals from a single sector or trade reinforcing their views; it is about bringing different perspectives to the table.

What unites this diverse network? Two key elements. First, **curiosity** — the drive to understand what is happening in different countries, what challenges and opportunities exist, and where collaboration can create value. Second, **action** — each member seeks to advance their communities, cities,

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### SIGNED BY



**Dr. Roberto Alvarez**  
Executive Director,  
GFCC

and countries by leveraging the GFCC to connect, learn, attract investment, and build solutions.

Competitiveness is the lens through which we approach these efforts. At its core, competitiveness is about maintaining a dynamic balance between cost and value structures in economies and societies. It is the ability of a country or region to create new value while managing costs to generate net benefits. Over time, this must be done sustainably, ensuring that policies, industrial strategies, and growth initiatives are viable for the long term.

The work we did in 2024 built on the foundations we laid in the **Frame the Future** series in 2021. Our focus on

innovation, resilience, sustainability, partnerships, and inclusiveness reinforced the idea that competitiveness is a systems challenge. A society cannot thrive if social cohesion is fractured. A city, region, or country cannot be competitive if environmental degradation undermines its future. Beyond preserving nature's beauty, we must protect the essential resources — water, energy, clean air — that sustain economies.

Fundamentally crucial and often forgotten in the sustainability equation is the economic dimension. Without economic opportunities and the development of their capabilities to create value, people and businesses will default to low-productivity activities, harming both the environment and society. Sustainable business and economic models are essential to maintaining social cohesion and environmental integrity. Competitiveness, then, is not just about growth—it is about sustaining prosperity over time.

Achieving this requires collective action. The GFCC thrives because it brings together different sectors, perspectives, and geographies to drive change. Competitiveness is local, regional, national, and global. Ensuring that every stakeholder has a seat at the table is what makes the GFCC unique.





We hosted the largest edition of the Global Innovation Summit, gathering over 850 participants from 30 countries in Belfast, Northern Ireland, for five days of insightful discussions, keynotes, and workshops focused on innovative models and strategies to address perceived trade-offs between sustainability, technological progress, and inclusiveness. The final day also included visits to industry sites.



We welcomed 11 new members from six countries: The Principals Fund Management, Australia Advisory Board on Competitiveness, Netlinkz, Western Sydney University, HEDx, New Strategy Center, Kazakhstan Growth Forum, Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI), Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Vanderbilt University and the University of Pittsburgh.



We hosted two **Expert Sessions** surveying the challenges and opportunities around the hydrogen economy, commenting on advancements in technologies in the area and innovative policy frameworks.



We released **seven new publications**, including: a groundbreaking **Call to Action** to guide stakeholders in advancing their economies and societies, considering economic performance, social inclusion, and environmental protection; a **White-Paper** about crisis definitions and frameworks; and **three case-studies** surveying innovations after the COVID-19 pandemic, the 9/11 attacks, and the Ukraine armed conflict; and a game-changing report about advancements in the hydrogen economy.



Our global footprint spans **38 countries**, amounting to **52 members** and **67 fellows**.



We executed, co-hosted, and participated in events on the ground in **Northern Ireland, Albania, and Greece**.



Our Competitive Edge blog continues to be a platform for our community to share knowledge and expose innovative ideas. In 2024, we published **12 pieces featuring or signed by our members** on various issues regarding competitiveness, ranging from strategies to make Africa more innovative, opportunities for universities in a changing environment, innovations that endured after COVID-19, trends in corporate responsibility, and others. [Visit our blog](#) to have access to this relevant and exclusive content.

**"At Vanderbilt, we are committed to pushing boundaries and creating real-world impact through our research and innovation. The GFCC offers a powerful platform to connect with like-minded stakeholders that share our mission of driving positive transformation in societies and economies."**

**Padma Raghavan**

Vice Provost for Research and Innovation  
and Chief Research Officer  
Senior Advisor to the Chancellor  
Distinguished Professor of Computer Science



## Mr. Charles Kiefel AM appointed Vice-Chair of the GFCC Board of Trustees

Mr. Charles Kiefel AM, the Founder and Executive Chair of the Principals Fund Management, has joined the GFCC Board of Trustees as Vice-Chair. Mr. Kiefel is an experienced businessman who played a leading role in investment management with superannuation funds in Australia.

The Vice-Chair contributes to amplify the GFCC's voice on the global stage through his networks. He is instrumental in elevating the organization international presence and global reach.

Mr. Kiefel founded the Principals Funds Management to provide global economic analysis and advice to U.S., European, Asian, and Australian money management companies, including investment and manager selection, enterprise and human capital risk management, and board governance.

Mr. Kiefel serves on numerous advisory boards, sharing his expertise and experience in private equity, strategy, and leadership, with public and private



Mr. Charles Kiefel AM, Founder and Executive Chair, Principals Fund Management during the GFCC Annual Meeting in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in November 2024.

enterprises. He was also a Non-Executive Board Director for multiple Australian companies.

Since 2018, Mr. Kiefel has served as Co-Chair of the Australian Advisory Board on Competitiveness. Initially, he was appointed by the Australian federal government to strategize and champion new ideas to drive productivity, prosperity, and economic growth for Australia and the United States.

In its new role, Mr. Kiefel will work to expand GFCC membership and impact.

The GFCC faces a pivotal moment. Our membership is expanding and gaining influence worldwide. In 2024, we welcomed 11 new members from six countries and seven new fellows. Our global footprint currently comprises 52 members spanning 23 nations.

In addition, our fellows span 25 countries — including 15 nations not represented in our membership. This outstanding group of individuals and organizations represents a remarkable and distinctive blend of economic, cultural, and organizational diversity.

### **The Principals Fund Management**

The Principals Funds is an Australia-based private enterprise that provides global advisory services to businesses, policy leaders, and organizations both in Australia and globally owned by our Distinguished Fellow and Vice-Chair, Mr. Charles Kiefel AM. Mr. Kiefel is a strategic thinker and doer who has had an incredibly successful career across sectors and industries. He has lived and worked in many countries and has expertise in technology strategy

and commercialization in various domains, outside of financial industries, including health technologies, infrastructure, air transportation, and energy, among others.

### **Australia Advisory Board on Competitiveness**

Founded and co-chaired by Mr. Charles Kiefel AM, the Board was established to advance innovation and competitiveness in Australia by supporting the building of scientific capability and promoting international partnerships, including with the GFCC. The Board is now a high-level leadership organization and a community of innovators that reunites leaders to explore innovation challenges and opportunities, frontiers of disruptive technologies, and infrastructure to support 21st-century innovation.



### Netlinkz

Netlinkz is an IT company that provides digital solutions to businesses of all sizes. Their innovative technology connects customers and teams through a VSN+ network and a satellite management portal, guaranteeing secure access to data centers from anywhere through an encrypted network configuration capability. Users can safely connect to their business data center even from unsafe networks, such as airport wifi.

### Western Sydney University

Western Sydney University (WSU) is a leading institution recognized for its world-class research. Ranked among the top 2 percent of universities worldwide, WSU excels in diverse research fields, including environmental sustainability, medicine, artificial intelligence, and social sciences. The university's research centers, such as the MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour & Development and the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment, are globally renowned for pioneering studies. With a strong focus on real-world applications, WSU collaborates with industry and

government to address global challenges, shaping a smarter, more sustainable future.

### HEDx

Based out in Australia, HEDx is an engagement and advisory firm focused on higher education. It offers services and solutions tailored to address the critical challenges facing the global higher education sector, including strategy, market demands, technology, innovation, and culture transformation to achieve equity. Its products also include conferences, publications, and a sector-leading podcast.

### Kazakhstan Growth Forum

Based out in Almaty, KGF is a market collaboration platform that provides professional conferences, workshops, roundtables, professional awards, and market analytics. But its impact goes much beyond that. KGF advocates for market self-governance, best market practices, and social impact in the region. Throughout the years, KGF has helped not only to forge strategic partnerships and joint strategic tasks but also to develop a favorable

investment environment by bringing together the opinions of different leaders and business experts and initiating regulatory and collaborative actions. KGF initiatives, such as the Centras 500, which ranks the top 500 corporations in Kazakhstan, serves as a key business indicator, along with its professional awards that honor the nation's top executives.

### **Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency**

Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI) was established in 2011 by a group of stakeholders, including Ibaraki Prefecture, Tsukuba City, the University of Tsukuba, and research institutions, to operate as a hub for research, startup companies, and technology transfer. It promotes the Tsukuba International Strategic Comprehensive Special Zone strategy, which was designated by the national government. Currently, TGI, as a hub organization, carries out various support activities in cooperation with governments, universities, research institutions, and companies to build an innovation ecosystem in the city.

### **Auckland University of Technology**

Established in 2000, AUT is a modern and inclusive institution, and one of the world's best young universities according to Times Higher Education. Under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Professor Damon Salesa, AUT strives to push the boundaries of education and research in a dynamic and transformative learning environment. Additionally, AUT is globally recognized for its commitment to inclusion and diversity. AUT runs five faculties, 14 schools, and 60 research centers and it is involved in a wide range of world-class research projects, working in collaboration with universities and partner organizations around the world.

### **Vanderbilt University**

Founded in 1873, Vanderbilt University is a top-tier institution dedicated to academic excellence, innovation, and collaboration. Located in the heart of Nashville, Tennessee, it hosts over 7,000 undergraduate students across 70 degrees, and more than 57 graduate programs. Vanderbilt encourages interdisciplinary study and research,

spending over \$1 billion in annual R&D expenditures. Its commitment to pushing boundaries and serving others is reflected in 1,500+ patent applications, industry license agreements, and material transfer agreements.

### University of Pittsburgh

The University of Pittsburgh is an academic and economic powerhouse based in Pennsylvania, United States, consistently ranked as one of America's top public research universities with over \$1 billion in yearly research productivity and distinction as a top-20 most-innovative university, Top 50 Best Global University, and Top Fulbright producer.

Led by Chancellor Joan Gabel, Pitt hosts nearly 34,000 students and more than 15,000 faculty and staff members across five distinct campuses. Prof. Gabel's leadership has prioritized inclusiveness and impact through the development of the University's first metrics-driven strategic plan and the creation of the Pitt Finish Line Grant, which provides just-in-time financial support for students nearing graduation.

### New Strategy Center

Based in Bucharest, this non-governmental institution specializes in foreign, defense, and security policies, providing expert advice, facilitating discussions, and conducting research focused on the Balkans and the Black Sea. Its portfolio extends beyond traditional national security concerns to include energy security, combating disinformation, societal resilience, food security, and cybersecurity. The center's activities are designed to foster collaboration between Romanian and international institutions, the business community, and both local and foreign experts while promoting Euro-Atlantic values and cooperation with NATO and the European Union.

### About Our New Fellows

#### The Honorable Greg Hunt, Distinguished Fellow

Professor Hunt is a highly experienced former Cabinet Minister, having served Australia as Minister for the Environment, Innovation, and Health across three major portfolios over almost nine years. As Minister for Health from 2017 to 2022, he oversaw

Australia's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, established telehealth as a permanent and universal centerpiece of Medicare, reformed private health, and established long-term plans for mental health, aged care, medical research, and primary care, and listed over 2,000 medicines for public access. Prof. Hunt is a Fulbright Scholar with a Master's Degree from Yale University and First Class Honours in Law from the University of Melbourne.

### **Alexander Downer, Distinguished Fellow**

Mr. Downer had an exceptional career in international diplomacy being the longest-serving Minister for Foreign Affairs in Australian history. He has also played an important role in the country's national politics starting as an advisor to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975-1983) and being later elected to the House of Representatives for the seat of Mayo, a position he held for 24 years. Additionally, Mr. Downer presided over the Australia Chamber of Commerce, helping to improve Australia's business environment and productivity through a series of initiatives with national

businesses of all sizes. After leaving Parliament in 2008, Mr. Downer continued to contribute to international relations as a Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General for Cyprus peace talks. His career reached another peak when he was appointed Australian High Commissioner to the UK from 2014 to 2018. Subsequently, he took on the role of Executive Chair of the International School for Government at King's College, London.

### **Hippolyte Fofack, Distinguished Fellow**

Dr. Hippolyte Fofack is a globally recognized expert in economic policy, development economics, and international finance with over 20 years of experience in leadership and management positions in multilateral organizations and academia. Dr. Fofack has led several research projects and participated in the production of national and regional development strategies and in creating and implementing multiple trade agreements and commercial strategies between the African continent and the United States. He is now a Research Associate at Harvard University Center for African

Studies. Previously, he was the Chief Economist and Director of Research at the African Export-Import Bank. He served in several capacities in the World Bank Group, including as head of the Macroeconomic and Growth Programme.

### **Chris Allen, Senior Fellow**

Chris Allen was Resident Economic Adviser in Athens for the European Commission from 2015-24. He played an important role in achieving the successful completion of the Greek crisis adjustment program and the coordinated implementation of the reforms and fiscal strategy that resulted in Greece's subsequent strong recovery. He was previously responsible for EU industrial and business policy-making, contributed to the EU's negotiating strategy on global climate change, and played an important role in the development of the EU Horizon 2020 partnerships on advanced industrial technologies.

### **Deborah C. Gordon, Senior Fellow**

Gordon serves as a Senior Advisor for Longview Fusion Energy Systems, Inc. and several other high technology companies where she helps them bridge the gap in understanding between science, industry, and government institutions. She is an Affiliate at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University from which she retired in August 2019 after 22 years as the Executive Director of, Stanford-Harvard Preventive Defense Project, co-directed by Sec. William Perry and Sec. Ashton Carter. She is the former Mayor of Woodside, California, and served 17 years on the Town Council in multiple roles.



"Universities are uniquely positioned to act as champions of digital inclusion and catalysts of socioeconomic transformation, creating thriving place-based innovation ecosystems that drive inclusive growth, sustainability, and genuine placemaking. The GFCC University Research and Leadership Forum (URLF) unites leaders from across the world with a shared purpose: to reimagine the role of universities in a world transforming at an unprecedented rate."



**Professor Aleks Subic**

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Aston University

Universities are navigating a rapidly changing world shaped by technological advancements and uncertainty. This new scenario has required them to transition to new business models, extending their influence beyond education to act as engines of regional innovation and social mobility.

In 2024, the GFCC inaugurated a new phase of the University Forum focused on understanding high-performing university-anchored innovation ecosystems and identifying best practices that can be replicated across the globe.

This multi-year journey will include a series of in-depth study trips to thriving innovation hubs worldwide and leadership dialogues among GFCC university members and leaders from government, industry, and community stakeholders.

By synthesizing the knowledge gained through these experiences, the URLF will identify and map key assets and develop a comprehensive toolkit to inform stakeholders of strategies and models for driving place-based innovation.

This toolkit will serve as a practical roadmap for universities to stimulate economic growth, create positive social impact, and ensure lasting prosperity in their communities and regions.

In our first study trip, our Community travelled to Birmingham, in November, 2024, to visit Aston University and the local innovation precinct. On occasion, we hosted a global forum called the *Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation*, gathering leaders from business, university, and government to discuss the role of universities in driving place-based and place-making innovation.



Leaders from the GFCC Community during the *Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation* in Birmingham, UK.

We are pleased that Professor Subic, Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive of Aston University, has accepted to chair the URLF in this new phase. Prof Subic has been championing the pivotal role universities play in driving place-based innovation through knowledge transfer and skills development for years. His mandate will include working with GFCC university members to organize a series of global study trips and leadership dialogues.

## Annual Meeting and Global Innovation Summit

The GFCC Annual Meeting brought together the GFCC Community, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, to reflect on key achievements in 2024, explore emerging issues in competitiveness agendas, map priorities within member organizations, and welcome new members and fellows to the GFCC network. Members and fellows also engaged in dynamic discussions on emerging themes related to innovation and competitiveness strategy.

The Annual Meeting kicked off with a first session focused on the current state of the GFCC and its strategic vision. President Deborah L. Wince-Smith and Executive Director Roberto Alvarez highlighted recent activities and achievements, commented on initiatives under development, and presented the key principles of the *2024 Call to Action: Achieving a Sustainable Future for All*.

The Annual Meeting marked the appointment of a new Vice-Chair for the organization. Chairman Charles “Chad” O. Holliday Jr. led the Board of Trustees and all members in



Padma Raghavan, Vice Provost for Research and Innovation and Chief Research Officer, speaks at the GFCC Annual Meeting, in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

attendance in welcoming Mr. Charles Kiefel AM as the new Vice-Chair of the GFCC Board of Trustees. Mr. Kiefel has been involved with the GFCC for many years as a Distinguished Fellow, and member — both his company, The Principals Funds Management, and the Australian Advisory Board on Competitiveness, which he chairs and represents on the Board of the GFCC, are members of our organization.

During the meeting, GFCC leaders showcased the work of the University and Research Leadership Forum, connecting the activities in Belfast with the *Leadership Dialogue on*





GFCC members and fellows at the GFCC Annual Meeting in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

*Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation* that took place in Birmingham, on November 8, hosted by Aston University.

Professor Aleks Subic made a presentation and led a roundtable discussion on place-making innovation, emphasizing the crucial role universities play in fostering innovation and, ultimately, being agents of change to transform the economies of the regions in which they are inserted.

The Annual Meeting concluded with a dynamic session focused on cutting-edge topics in competitiveness

strategy. In a series of four pocket presentations followed by roundtable discussions, members shared experiences and perspectives on critical emerging themes, including future studies, decarbonization, frontier markets, and geostrategy.

In this final session, leaders explored cases in 14 nations — plus experiences at the continental level in Africa — and discussed how to turn the examples shared and ideas generated into actionable recommendations for integrating these subjects into national and regional strategies.



## Global Innovation Summit

The **2024 Global Innovation Summit** gathered over 850 participants from 30 countries in Belfast, Northern Ireland, between November 12 and 15, for discussions around two of the most pressing matters impacting global competitiveness agendas today: sustainability and economic inclusiveness.

Under the theme *Accelerating Global Sustainability and Economic Inclusion*, over 130 speakers working in business, government, higher education, and civil society discussed ways to overcome the perceived trade-off between economic performance, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The GIS also served as a hub for high-profile connections, insight generation, and developing of global strategies towards a sustainable and equitable future.

The event was built upon a longstanding partnership between Northern Ireland and the GFCC, a collaboration instrumental in fostering a thriving innovation and productivity ecosystem across the Island of Ireland.



Mr. Charles O. Holliday Jr., Chairman, GFCC; and the Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President, GFCC, and President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness, speak during the Global Innovation Summit, in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Once renowned for its tobacco, rope making, linen production, and ship-building, Belfast has evolved into a dynamic knowledge economy. This transformation has propelled Northern Ireland onto the global stage as a significant player, particularly in sectors like advanced manufacturing, ICT, cybersecurity, and fintech. Efforts by GIS' hosts, the Centre for Competitiveness and Queen's University Belfast have contributed to the successful regional transformation.



Attendees watch a panel session during the Global Innovation Summit, in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The event solidified the understanding that sustainability must be the foundation of our future, harmonizing economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusiveness through shared knowledge and cross-sector collaboration.

Following tradition, we presented a set of *Global Competitiveness Awards* during the Summit. The GFCC bestowed awards in recognition of Visionary Leadership in Advancing the All-Island Competitiveness of Ireland to Dr. Stephen Kingon and

Dr. Martin Naughton. It also presented awards in recognition of Leadership in Advancing the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland to Dr. Bob Barbour and Dr. Paul Madden.

Second, the GFCC was delighted to honor Professor Sir Ian Greer and Professor Aleksandar Subic, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Aston University, in recognition of Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (Professor Subic received his award the week before in Birmingham).

## Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socioeconomic Transformation

Universities, industry, and research organizations are navigating a fast-changing world shaped by technological advancements and uncertainty. To help them thrive in this dynamic environment, the **University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF)** has launched an ambitious initiative to uncover what makes university-anchored innovation ecosystems successful.

This new phase highlights the critical role universities play as catalysts for socioeconomic transformation, working with partners across sectors and helping build the assets needed for future economies.

The URLF's mission is to empower universities to drive socio-economic transformation. Over the next several years, the Forum will host study tours to leading innovation hubs worldwide and facilitate leadership dialogues



Prof. Aleks Subic, CEO and Vice-Chancellor at Aston University, and panelists talk about place-based innovation in Birmingham during the Leadership Dialogue.

with GFCC university members and stakeholders from government, industry, and local communities.

These activities aim to generate practical insights, and identify key drivers of innovation, and key elements in much-needed toolkits for place-based and place-making innovation.

The 2024 Leadership Dialogue at Aston University in Birmingham was a major milestone in this effort. From





Birmingham's innovation precinct to the successful cases of Phoenix, Belfast, San Diego, Sidney and Auckland, among others, the event showcased best practices and strategies for aligning university efforts with regional needs while building global connections and scientific relevance. Looking ahead, the URLF will build on these efforts with more dialogues and visits to university-led innovation hubs worldwide. These activities will deepen our understanding of how universities can create meaningful change.



Participants at the Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socio-economic Transformation.

## Driving Innovation in Times of Crisis

Societies continue to grapple in a world filled with crises, ranging from climate change and extreme weather events to high inflation and rising cost of living, energy and food insecurity, as well as armed conflicts and cyber attacks on critical infrastructure. In sum, crises have become a constant, and learning to navigate turbulence is a highly valued competitive differentiator.

Thinking of ways to deepen the understanding of crisis to facilitate innovation in periods of disruption, the GFCC and the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) started the **Driving Innovation in Times of Crisis (DITC)** in 2022.

In 2024, we published four insightful publications as a result of the work conducted by John Katsos, Ph.D. candidate at Queens University Belfast, and Ailun Gu, a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Auckland: A White Paper on *Crisis Definitions and Frameworks* and three case-studies, surveying innovations after the 9/11 attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine Armed Conflict. The latest was written by Denys Ilnytsky, an academic from Kyiv National Economic University.

## Monthly Calls

We continued welcoming GFCC members and fellows to our exclusive **Monthly Calls**. This recurring event serves 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 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 about a relevant topic in the competitiveness agenda. In 2024, our calls included presentations and discussions on:

- Adaptive learning and AI
- Fusion Energy
- Kenya's innovation masterplan
- Proactive approaches to integrate ESG
- Brazil's new industrial policy
- The Omnipreneurship model by the Al Dabbagh Group
- Challenges and opportunities in Digital Public Infrastructure
- And other topics



Our members stand at the forefront of engaging initiatives that bridge innovation, sustainability, and competitiveness on a global scale. Thinking of a way to value their work and share their projects worldwide, we launched the GFCC Stories in 2024.

This exclusive platform serves to showcase innovative initiatives led by our members and to collect best practices and experiences. Since then, we published six stories, highlighting initiatives that have had an impact on cities, regions, and nations.

### **Cross-Sectoral Initiative in Northern Ireland Produces Biomethane to Achieve Decarbonization**

The Center for Competitiveness (CforC) is leading a Northern Ireland initiative to cut emissions by producing biomethane from farm manure. In partnership with local businesses and Queen's University Belfast, their government-backed model is now ready for wider use.

### **Harnessing AI to Bridge the Digital Divide in Eastern Europe**

Romania's 2017 law mandated STEM education for all students, but a shortage of qualified teachers in underprivileged areas created a challenge. To address this,

entrepreneurs and professors from Bucharest University of Economic Studies developed an AI-powered adaptive learning platform, Nextlab.Tech. This virtual assistant helps teachers deliver lessons in robotics, programming, cybersecurity, and more to students aged 8–25.

### **New Institute at Aston University Develops Solutions to Societal Challenges Building on Strategic Partnerships**

Aston University, under the leadership of Prof. Aleks Subic, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Aston, and co-chair of the GFCC University and Research Leadership Forum, established the Aston Digital Futures Institute (ADFI) as part of the effort to fulfill its 2030 vision of leveraging digital technologies to transform the university into a digital enterprise.

## **Newly Launched Falcon Foundation Wants to Boost the Development of Open-Source AI Models Across Industries**

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) utilizing Large Language Models (LLMs) has revolutionized multiple industries. However, despite their immense commercial potential, LLMs have largely remained controlled by a handful of tech giants. In a bid to counter this trend, the Technology Innovation Institute (TII) created the Falcon 40B—an open-source generative AI model available completely royalty-free.

## **New Zealand's MedTech Translator: Bridging Research and Commercialization**

An innovative consortium of New Zealand universities—including Auckland University and the University of Technology—along with the national innovation agency, has strengthened the country's medical technology industry. By enhancing connectivity among stakeholders, the initiative has been instrumental in driving innovation, translating research into practice, and fostering industry growth.

## **The Story of PacifiCan: A Development Agency Rooted in Community**

PacifiCan is a Canadian regional development agency designed to support the growth and diversification of British Columbia's economy and advance the interests of the region in national economic policy, programs, and projects. The agency's core and temporary funding programs aim to advance enduring economic growth and inclusion while also tackling specific opportunities. PacifiCan also played a crucial role in connecting communities, and fostering collaboration between Indigenous populations and neighboring towns.

We continued to host our Expert Sessions, diving into relevant issues shaping the world and impacting competitiveness. These exclusive events started in 2022 and are part of our exclusive offerings for members and fellows, presenting our community with an opportunity to interact with experts, ask questions, and send comments.

**March 14**

### **Hydrogen Economy**

The search for alternatives to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy has placed hydrogen on the radar in various regions of the globe and within the business sector. As a result, the Hydrogen Economy is growing at a fast pace globally, with advancements in technology, policy, and investment. In this session, leaders from the GFCC network working in Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, and Ireland surveyed advancements in the hydrogen economy in their regions and mapped out emerging opportunities.

**June 13**

### **Hydrogen Q&A**

Following up on the first Expert Session on the Hydrogen Economy on March 14th and based on the feedback we received from our Community, we hosted a Q&A conversation to uncover key insights into the successes and challenges of implementing hydrogen strategies globally. This session allowed participants to interact with experts and to foster knowledge exchange and possible collaboration among the GFCC network.

"The GIS brought together thought leaders and key international figures from businesses, industry, government, higher education, third sector, and communities, to discuss and devise solutions to some of the most pressing issues in our world today. Hosting the Summit at Queen's firmly placed our University and Belfast at the center of these important discussions."

**Professor Sir Ian Greer**

President and Vice-Chancellor Queen's University Belfast.



## ***Call to Action: Achieving a Sustainable Future for All***

The *Call to Action: Achieving a Sustainable Future for All* offers a strategic framework to guide stakeholders in advancing their economies and societies sustainably. The document explores the crucial link between long-term sustainability and social inclusion, examines approaches for measuring progress towards a sustainable future, and discusses the critical interplay between environmental preservation and technological advancement. Structured into ten interconnected action areas, it emphasizes the interdependence of sustainability dimensions and the systemic nature of effective solutions. Each action area is supported by guiding principles and key strategies to foster effective and comprehensive solutions.



## *Universities in Action: Building Cross-sector Alliances and Making Impact on Society*

In a decade of growing global interconnectivity and accelerated technological change, universities have a crucial role in shaping, designing, and implementing the innovation of the future for the benefit of all. On September 29, 2023, the GFCC and the Brazilian National Confederation of Industries (CNI) held an exclusive meeting, in São Paulo, Brazil, with industry and university leaders to explore ways to develop talent and build local and national innovation capacity. The report captures insights from the forum highlighting key initiatives connecting universities and industry that aimed at fostering innovation ecosystems and contributing to the growth of local and regional economies.





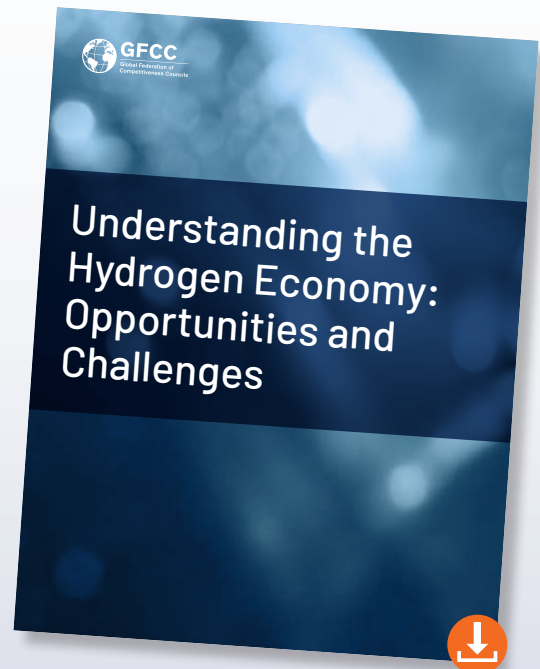
## GIS 2023 Report

The report builds on discussions and insights shared during the Annual Meeting and Global Innovation Summit, in London, United Kingdom, between November 13 and 14. A group of global leaders from over 35 countries gathered at the Gallup's headquarters to explore a range of topics impacting global competitiveness, including the role of innovation in advancing sustainability and meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the future of the workplace, innovation in periods of crisis, North-South collaborations, among others. The report captures these insights and provides key takeaways from the discussions.



## *Understanding the Hydrogen Economy: Opportunities and Challenges*

The hydrogen economy holds extraordinary promise for a cleaner, more sustainable energy future. In March 2024, the GFCC convened an exclusive Hydrogen Economy Expert Session on the hydrogen nascent industry. This session explored how nations are positioning themselves within the hydrogen market and shared the latest advancements in the field. The report presents the key takeaways from our Expert Session.



## Driving Innovation in Times of Crisis

Through a series of activities and research products, the DITC aimed to develop actionable recommendations to empower businesses, governments, and organizations to thrive in instability and unlock new opportunities for innovation and prosperity.

In 2023, the GFCC onboarded two researchers working in organizations within the network: John Katsos, Ph.D. candidate at Queens University Belfast, and Ailun Gu, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Auckland.

As a result of their work, based on extensive academic research and a series of interviews with our members and fellows, **we published a White Paper and three case studies.**

### White Paper

The *White Paper: Crises Definitions and Frameworks* establishes a crisis definition to guide stakeholders to identify periods of crisis and proposes recommendations on how to innovate from crisis (rather than being stymied by it). Additionally, it provided a list



of past events, with criteria for categorizing them, differentiating their characteristics between emergency, disaster, and crisis. Finally, the White Paper brings an analysis of a set of possible responses and the best scenario to drive innovation.

### Case-studies

In April 2022, during an exclusive meeting, our members and fellows chose three case studies that were relevant to our community and needed in-depth analysis. Those were the

9/11 terrorist attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing Ukraine armed conflict.

GFCC researchers developed the case-studies, unveiling the concepts and ideas that permeated each crisis, their implications, and possible innovations steaming from them. The case about the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine was written by Denys Ilnytskyi, an academic from Kyiv National Economic University.



## Delphi Economic Forum

Between April 10 and 13, GFCC leaders traveled to Greece to play a leadership role at the Delphi Economic Forum, led by its Founder and CEO, Mr. Symeon Tsomokos. For years, the GFCC has been a program partner to the forum providing exclusive content on a set of topics related to future growth, innovation, and competitiveness.

In one of the discussions, the GFCC brought together leaders from Albania, Bulgaria, the United States, and Greece to examine the state of competitiveness and innovation across Europe. The panel explored strategies, policies, and programs designed to foster innovation and enhance competitiveness. Key topics included national technology strategies, initiatives targeting SMEs and entrepreneurs, efforts to advance Industry 4.0 by stimulating industry clusters and technology hubs, talent development, and policies aimed at creating a business environment conducive to innovation.

In another discussion, leaders from the United States and Greece delved into the models and challenges associated with infrastructure development to support R&D and innovation. The conversation highlighted the urgent need to modernize existing public and academic laboratory facilities to address the growing demand for computing power driven by AI. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of establishing multistakeholder frameworks to promote dialogue and collaboration between industry and the research community, which are critical for driving innovation.

## Albanian Competitiveness and Innovation Council

The GFCC and its founder, the Council on Competitiveness — along with the Council's Vice Chair for Academia, Professor Joan Gabel, the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh — participated in the launch of the Albanian Competitiveness and Innovation Council (ACIC) led by Mr. Lulzim Basha, Chairman of the Democratic Party of Albania and founder of ACIC, and Mr. Erion Isufi, CEO of Landmark Technologies and Executive Director of ACIC.

The meeting with Albanian businesses, universities, public sector leaders, and foreign dignitaries marked the beginning of new partnerships between Albania and universities in the United States. On occasion, GFCC President, the Hon. Deborah L. Wince, received an honorary doctor's degree from the European University in recognition of her role in advancing competitiveness in the United States and globally through the mission of the GFCC.



After a year of significant achievements marked by the expansion of our network and the establishment of important partnerships, we are set to start developing new projects and initiatives with our community.

Our vision is that we can build more inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and innovative economies by harnessing the power of cross-sector partnerships and driving win-win solutions.

We encourage our network to think through these two paradigms when negotiating with stakeholders and assessing strategies for the future. Win-win solutions not only benefit all parties involved but also foster economic stability and shared prosperity.

In 2025, we will continue to build on the strengths of our community, working with members to disseminate competitiveness best practices and forging partnerships to advance innovation and inclusive prosperity across the globe. How will we do that?

- We will build on and amplify the URLF's focus on place-making innovation by activating the Global Centre for Innovation Leadership — launching innovation study trips, as well as co-designing and co-delivering courses with our members.
- We will serve as a strategic knowledge partner to our members. For example, we will participate in the Delphi Economic Forum—convening a leadership discussion to advance the *2024 Call to Action*; we will partner with the New Strategy Center and its Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum; we will create the second edition of our “Innovation Arena” in partnership with the Council on Competitiveness and CNI at COP30 in Belém, Brazil.

- We will spur and inspire the creation of a new, Africa-centric competitiveness movement under the guidance of GFCC fellows Col. C. Derek Campbell, Dr. Hippolyte Fofack, Dr. Nkem Khumbah, and Dr. Kandeh Yumkella.

Finally, we are delighted to confirm that the **2025 Global Innovation Summit** will return to the United States from October 19–22.

Our unique network thrives on partnerships and the unparalleled intellectual contributions of our growing membership. Together, we celebrate the fulfillment of a vision that leaders and countries can come together around the themes of innovation and competitiveness and learn from each other how to promote prosperity for all nations.

**Thank you for your partnership in 2024. We look forward to working with you in 2025.**

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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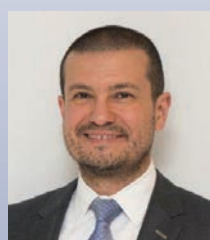
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