



GFCC
Global Federation of
Competitiveness Councils



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

2024: A Year of Growth and Leadership Impact

This past year brought significant achievements and inspiration for our growing GFCC community. We forged important partnerships to advance competitiveness and inclusive prosperity, built meaningful connections with influential stakeholders, and expanded our policy impact around the world. Our 2024 accomplishments highlight our community's catalytic role—powering positive transformation and advancing collaboration on numerous fronts.

The commitment to advance competitiveness in cities, regions, and nations through engagement and cooperation around a common agenda unites the global leaders, doers, and thinkers in the GFCC. Global competitiveness is built on the cooperation of leaders who set a pace for innovation that lifts all boats in a rising tide. By working together and sharing knowledge, we can unleash value creation, spur economic and productivity growth, support resiliency and sustainability, provide security and prosperity—in the end, building a better world.

I thank our GFCC Chairman, Mr. Chad Holliday, for his leadership and commitment to the GFCC since its inception in 2010. We are indebted to him for sharing his vision, support, and wisdom—all of which guide the GFCC and its growth.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Charles Kiefel AM, founder and co-chair of the Australian Advisory Board on Competitiveness. In November 2024, we nominated and appointed Mr. Kiefel to the role of GFCC Board of Trustees Vice-Chair. In this role, Mr. Kiefel will focus GFCC leadership and the overall community on advancing strategic, institutional development, and expanding membership.

The GFCC Community currently comprises 52 members spanning 23 nations. In addition, our fellows span 25 countries—including 15 nations not represented in our membership, bringing our total global footprint to nearly three dozen countries across six continents. This outstanding group of individuals and organizations represents a remarkable and extremely distinctive blend of economic, cultural, and organizational diversity.

This year, I am particularly proud of a set of significant partnerships we catalyzed within our membership. These include but are not limited to:

- Establishing the Global Center for Innovation and Leadership, an initiative by the GFCC in partnership with several university members.
- Agreeing to advance education, innovation, and technology between the Brazilian National Service for Industrial Training (SENAI), the Centre for Competitiveness (CforC), and Queen's University Belfast.
- Developing a dual PhD program provided by Queen's University Belfast and Aston University, building on a partnership sparked by the GFCC in 2023
- Committing to forge a strategic partnership to advance a new GFCC initiative focused on accelerating competitiveness and innovation across Africa.

2024 Highlights

This year we were proud to gather the GFCC and bring to fruition our year's activities during the Annual Meeting and Global Innovation Summit (GIS). The events took place over the week of November 11th at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland (QUB). The Summit that followed our members' Annual Meeting brought together hundreds of global, influential leaders from industry, government, academia, and civil society organizations to discuss solutions for two of the most pressing challenges facing the global economy: sustainability and economic inclusiveness.

Under the theme **Accelerating Global Competitiveness and Economic Inclusiveness**, the GIS featured over a 5-day period a range of conversations, keynotes, and workshops addressing the challenges and opportunities arising from topics as diverse as: AI and digitalization; groundbreaking innovations driving the energy transition; the essential role of cooperation in advancing food security; and strategies to overcome perceived trade-offs between sustainability, technological progress, and inclusiveness.

We also explored the importance of maximizing human talent by integrating all geographies and demographics into the innovation economy. And we emphasized the central role cross-sector partnerships play in driving collective progress toward a sustainable future.

Recognizing the inherent connection between sustainability, inclusiveness, and competitiveness, we launched at the GIS the GFCC's 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.

The success of the GIS would not have been possible without the invaluable support and leadership of our hosts. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Queen's University Belfast and its distinguished President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Ian Greer. Similarly, I want to thank the Centre for Competitiveness and its leadership team—Dr. Stephen Kingon, Chairman; Dr. Bob Barbour, CEO; and Dr. Paul Madden, Director. I would also like to offer a special thanks to QUB's Dr. Ryan Feeney for his instrumental role in organizing the Summit.

The GIS also included addresses from a slate of distinguished speakers. I want to acknowledge and thank the First Minister of Northern Ireland, Michelle O'Neill, the Deputy First Minister

of Northern Ireland, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA, and the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, for joining our event and contributing to discussions. We were also honored to have with us in closing the GIS former First Lady and U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

Following tradition, we presented a set of Global Competitiveness Awards during the Summit. First, we were delighted to bestow awards in recognition of **Visionary Leadership in Advancing the All-Island Competitiveness of Ireland** to Dr. Stephen Kingon and Dr. Martin Naughton. We also presented awards in recognition of **Leadership in Advancing the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland** to Dr. Bob Barbour and Dr. Paul Madden. These awardees are all colleagues with whom I have had the honor of working, in some cases, for nearly two decades—as the Council on Competitiveness has played a pivotal role in Belfast and across the entire Island to inculcate and cultivate a thriving competitiveness movement, through work over time with many key stakeholders like the Ireland National Council on Competitiveness, the Northern Ireland Centre for Competitiveness, and InterTrade Ireland.

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, where he hosted a special meeting on university-based innovation and entrepreneurship).

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.

In addition, at the end of the week prior to 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 Socio-economic Transformation** reunited GFCC leaders from Australia, Brazil, Greece, Japan, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as representatives 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 long-standing 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, and his mandate will include working with our university members to organize a series of global study trips and leadership dialogues focusing on identifying best and “next” practices emerging in university-anchored innovation ecosystems. The recent dialogue in Birmingham marked the first event in this series. I would also like to recognize and thank Ms. Clare Noakes for working to organize this outstanding event at Aston University.

To provide this series with structure and goals, members of the GFCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a new **Global Centre for Innovation Leadership**. Founding members of the Centre signing the initial MOU include the GFCC, Aston University, the University of California San Diego, the Universiti Teknologi Petronas, and Queen’s University Belfast. 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 U.S. 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). I want to recognize 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, for their leadership and commitment to start a competitiveness organization in the Balkans.

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 – leveraging the findings of the GFCC and the U.S. Council on Competitiveness, and sharing best practices with the Lord

Mayor of Birmingham, Professor Subic, and over 200 other senior figures from industry, public services, education, and professional organizations.

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 Capeloa Gil, President of the university. The GFCC’s Distinguished Fellow Ms. Athina Chatzipetrou 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—details of which I will outline in the following paragraphs.

Expanding our impact

In 2024, we continued to engage our community in exclusive Monthly Calls and Expert Sessions focused on relevant issues shaping the world and making an impact on innovation and competitiveness. This year, we hosted high-profile guest speakers on discussions ranging from an exploration of the future prospects of a global hydrogen economy (multiple speakers), to understanding the competitiveness value of ESG (led by Ms. Chatzipetrou), to examining Kenya’s innovation master plan (led by Senior Fellow Dr. Nkem Khumbah), to mining the promise of fusion energy (led by Senior Fellow Ms. Deborah Gordon), to witnessing the power of adaptive learning strategies (led by Professor Razvan Bologa, Bucharest University), etc.

And as we transition from 2024 to 2025, the GFCC faces a pivotal moment – a moment in which our membership is expanding and gaining influence worldwide. In 2024, we welcomed 11 new members:

- Four businesses and one university from Australia: The Principals Fund Management, Australia Advisory Board on Competitiveness, Netlinkz, Western Sydney University, and HEDx.
- New Strategy Center, from Romania.
- Kazakhstan Growth Forum, from Kazakhstan.
- Tsukuba Global Innovation Promotion Agency (TGI), from Japan.
- Auckland University of Technology (AUT), from New Zealand.
- Two distinguished universities from the United States: Vanderbilt University and the University of Pittsburgh.

The GFCC network of fellows is an incomparable brain trust, and we are excited to have brought on board five Distinguished Fellows and two Senior Fellows in 2024:

- Chris Allen, Senior Fellow¹
- Alexander Downer, Distinguished Fellow²
- Hyppolyte Fofack, Distinguished Fellow³
- Deborah C. Gordon, Senior Fellow⁴
- Greg Hunt, Distinguished Fellow⁵
- Hiro Nishiguchi, Distinguished Fellow⁶
- Mohd Yussof Sulaiman, Distinguished Fellow⁷

Our new members and fellows will contribute to enriching our in-community learning and external action agenda. We look forward to mobilizing this incredible group of organizations and individuals to build new partnerships and advance the competitiveness agendas in the countries represented in our network.

In 2024, we also published the results of the extensive research carried out under the **Driving Innovation in Times of Crisis** initiative, in partnership with the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST). We published an exclusive report surveying definitions of crisis, as well as a set of impactful case studies analyzing three global crises: the 9/11 terror attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine armed conflict.

Additionally, in May 2024, the GFCC Board of Trustees met to review the organization's strategic initiatives and to develop processes to advance membership. We are pleased that in addition to having added Mr. Kiefel to our Board as Vice Chair, Mr. Ricardo Alban, President of the Brazilian National Confederation of Industry (CNI), has also joined as a member of the GFCC Board.

Looking ahead

The year ahead will bring many other promising activities. In 2025, we will continue to build and strengthen our community, working with members to disseminate competitiveness best practices, and forging new partnerships to advance innovation and inclusive prosperity across the globe. How?

- 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 GFCC 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 U.S. Council on Competitiveness and CNI—at COP30 in Belem, Brazil; etc.
- 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. Hyppolyte Fofack, Dr. Nkem Khumbah, Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, and Dr. Deborah Gordon.

Finally, we are delighted to confirm the 2025 Global Innovation Summit will return to its roots—taking place in the United States at the end of October. The University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Joan Gabel will host on campus, as she announced in her concluding remarks at the 2024 GIS alongside me and former First Lady and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

One final note for 2025: please remember and take to heart the challenge from our Chair, Chad Holliday. He has urged everyone in our GFCC community to select at least one of the

1 Chris Allen was the 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.

2 Alexander Downer is an Australian statesman and diplomat with a career spanning over four decades. He acted as a political advisor to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and later led the Australian Chamber of Commerce. In 1984, he was elected to the House of Representatives for the seat of Mayo, a position he held for 24 years.

3 Hyppolyte Fofack is a leading development and financial economist with more than 20 years of experience in leadership and management, development economics, banking, international finance, and academia. He has served in several capacities, including most recently as Chief Economist and Director of Research and International Cooperation at the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank).

4 Deborah Gordon serves as a Senior Advisor for Longview Fusion Energy Systems and several other high technology companies where she helps to bridge the gap 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 the Stanford-Harvard Preventive Defense Project.

5 Greg Hunt is a highly experienced former Cabinet Minister in the Australian Government, having served as Australia's Minister for the Environment, Innovation, and Health across three major portfolios over almost nine years. As Minister for Industry, Innovation & Science, he laid the foundation for the Australian Space Agency. As Minister for the Environment, he established the Emissions Reduction Fund, the Green Army, and the \$1 billion Reef Trust and helped lead Australia's negotiations for the Montreal Protocol update and the Paris Climate Change Accord. For his work as Environment Minister, Greg was named Best Minister in the World at the World Government Summit in 2016.

6 Hiro Nishiguchi is an entrepreneur dedicated to enhancing global society by proliferating innovation management systems across diverse organizations and cultivating startup ecosystems worldwide. He is currently serving as the Managing Director of GEN Japan at the Global Entrepreneurship Network, President of SG Japan at Startup Genome, President of Japan Bosai (Disaster Risk Reduction) Platform, Chief Innovation Officer of the Advent Group, and Professor at Sophia University.

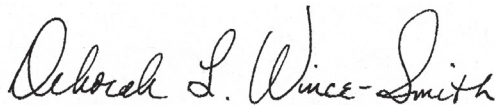
7 Mohd Yussof Sulaiman has developed national and industrial policies and strategies in the areas of high technology and innovation through smart partnerships and established new technology institutions in Malaysia. He is the President of Malaysia Rail Industry Corporation (MARIC), Chairman of UPM Innovations at Universiti Putra Malaysia, and was the President & CEO of the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT) for over 15 years.

ten action areas in the 2024 Call-to-Action and to commit to concrete efforts to effect change in that area. Please start to think about this—and begin to take action so that you can share your journey with the GFCC community in Pittsburgh later this year.

Finally, I want to recognize for their work and commitment the GFCC team: Chad Evans, Treasurer of the Board; Dr. Roberto Alvarez, Executive Director and Secretary to the Board; Dr. Elaine Rodriguez, Director of Operations; Simone Melo, Communications Manager; and Rylie Pope, Project Coordinator.

I remain honored to serve as the GFCC President, and to work with each and every one of our GFCC members and fellows. Thank you all for your continued support of the GFCC, and I look forward to creating and innovating with you in 2025.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah L. Wince-Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah L. Wince-Smith

Founder and President, GFCC

President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness