



GFCC

Global Federation of
Competitiveness Councils

CALL TO ACTION

Place-Based Innovation: An Imperative for Future Growth

This document was developed by Roberto Alvarez based on knowledge accumulated over the years throughout different GFCC initiatives, with contributions from GFCC members and fellows. Special thanks to Jerry Hultin and Chad Evans for their comments and review and Carol Meares for her edits.

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The Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) is a network of leaders and organizations from around the world committed to the implementation of competitiveness strategies to drive innovation, productivity and prosperity for nations, regions and cities. The GFCC develops and implements ideas, concepts, initiatives and tools to understand and navigate the complex competitiveness landscape.

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Executive Summary

This Call to Action presents recommendations to national, regional, and local policy stakeholders to advance place-based innovation. The approach recognizes that talent and most assets needed for innovation are geographically distributed, and that cities and regions need to understand, connect, complement, better leverage, and further develop such assets to augment their capacity to create value and transform their economies.

This Call to Action reflects the cumulative work of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils, building on expertise in our multi-stakeholder network spanning more than 30 nations. It is from that perspective that we call on leaders at all levels to make place-based innovation a priority.

We call on **national policy stakeholders** to put in place strategies to support cities and regions to accelerate innovation and their economic transformation.

We call on **regional and local stakeholders** to assemble teams of leaders to guide and drive innovation and economic transformation initiatives.

To do that, we present 10 recommendations for action at the regional and local level:

1. Understand the reality on the ground
2. Create a roadmap for future growth
3. Put a special action team in charge
4. Use all available resources to advance innovation
5. Reduce friction and encourage entrepreneurship
6. Make your infrastructure a factor of success
7. Create connections to accelerate innovation
8. Nurture an innovative talent pool
9. Focus on high value-added industries and quality of life
10. Position your regional strengths on the global stage

We invite you to read the full document and to take action to advance your own economic and competitive position, and capacity for innovation. Please count on the GFCC for that journey.

Place-Based Innovation: An Imperative for Future Growth

Innovation is the main driver for future growth in all economies and at all levels – national, regional, and local. To build future sustainable, resilient, and prosperous economies, nations must strive to bring all their cities and regions, and social and demographic groups into the innovation game. To do that, national, regional, and local stakeholders must collaborate to further place-based innovation.

Why placed-based innovation? Innovation drives local, regional, and national economies. It has become the main force behind the processes through which economic assets – such as knowledge, technology, capital, and talent – are combined and used by industry to create new products and services to capture market opportunity. Over time, these assets can accumulate and their mix change, becoming more sophisticated and augmenting the capacity of cities, regions, and nations to generate new value and become more prosperous. Today, many nations, states, regions, and cities are developing and deploying strategies to strengthen the ecosystems that support these processes.

This Call to Action on Place-Based Innovation recognizes that geography matters, place matters, local and regional realities matter. It recognizes that place-based innovation strategies must operate across two dimensions.

- First, a place-based innovation approach must reflect asymmetries found across regions within any given country, and the need to address these differences to advance local and national prosperity.
- Second, these strategies must take into account that talent and most assets needed to advance innovation are geographically distributed, that cities and regions have assets they can leverage to further develop their economies and contribute nationally.

Addressing both regional asymmetries and bringing all regions and cities – and all social and demographic groups – into the future economy is an imperative for all countries, particularly those with large territories.

Who is the audience for this Call to Action? Many stakeholders – governments, industry, non-profits, investors, the education and research community, training providers, and coalitions of these entities – must be involved in place-based innovation initiatives. The recommendations in this Call to Action are proposed for: (1) **national policy stakeholders** tasked with promoting innovation, growth, and economic transformation across regions in their countries, and (2) **local and regional stakeholders** advancing their local economies.

What's in the Call to Action? GFCC members call on stakeholders at all levels – national, regional, and local – to take action to advance place-based innovation, but also to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach; the design of all initiatives must reflect the realities of the places to which they will be applied and deployed. This Call to Action presents recommendations generated through a consultation process involving members and fellows of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils, building on expertise in our multi-stakeholder network spanning more than 30 nations.

We hope you enjoy and profit from the recommendations in this Call to Action. More than that, we hope you can use them to act and help improve your own community and economy at whatever level that may be.

A Call to Action for National and Regional/Local Stakeholders

I. Catalyze place-based innovation at the national level

Put in place national strategies for working with cities and regions to accelerate innovation and economic transformation.

Cities and regions do not exist or operate in a vacuum, they are part of nations. Countries should have in place national strategies to foster and support place-based innovation. These strategies are critical, especially in large nations which tend to be marked by regional differences within them.

Each country has its particular characteristics. Political regimes, legal frameworks, societal priorities, industry and government capabilities, levels of economic development, global exposure, and challenges vary across nations. Recognizing such diversity, we recommend the following to national authorities and stakeholders when putting in place strategies and frameworks to foster and support place-based innovation:

- **Be flexible.** There is no one-size-fits-all strategy or approach. National strategies must recognize the diversity of local and regional realities within a country, and be designed to accommodate different types of initiatives, institutional roles, and partnership models.
- **Aim to build investment, talent, capabilities, and infrastructure at the regional level.** For regions to advance innovation, they need to develop talent, have the infrastructure that supports research and innovation, expand the amount of capital accessible to businesses and innovators, and enhance business and government capabilities. National strategies should focus on advancing the provision of these assets for all regions.
- **Catalyze local and regional partnerships.** National strategies should catalyze partnerships in local communities, states and regions, and between them, and reward regional and local cross-sector entrepreneurial behavior and initiatives that aim to advance innovation and promote growth. National strategies cannot replace local and regional initiatives, and national governments should avoid pushing solutions into regions.
- **Look for shared commitments.** National strategies should leverage local and regional entrepreneurial energy and resources through shared investment and commitments. Resources should be allocated based on clear rationales, capacity displayed, and commitments by local and/or regional stakeholders. To access resources, regions should have roadmaps for future growth and adhere to governance standards.
- **Make expertise and technical assistance available to regional stakeholders.** Governance, management, and technical capabilities are not evenly distributed within countries. Least developed cities and regions are less likely to have the capabilities needed to create roadmaps for their future growth, organize projects, access resources, govern partnerships, and manage initiatives. National strategies should address that gap and provide technical assistance.
- **Leverage digital technologies.** Digital technologies must play a major role in national strategies, including investments in digital connectivity and skills across regions. These strategies should also leverage digital technologies to enable local and regional initiatives to access resources globally and develop, attract, and retain talent.

II. Drive place-based innovation at the local and regional levels

Assemble a core team of leaders to guide and drive local and regional innovation and economic transformation initiatives.

Transforming local economies requires vision, leadership, determination, and strong and sustained commitment of local stakeholders over an extended period of time. It is not an easy task or light commitment.

Everything starts with people. Any initiative should start with the formation of a core group of leaders who will invest time, energy, and social capital to launch the concept, get buy-in, and build a movement to advance innovation and transform the economy. This core group will strategize and bring others onboard, serve as a source of mutual support, and gradually mobilize the resources needed to lift off the initiative. The group must include leaders from different segments of society, who are recognized in the local community, have strong ties among themselves, and can provide visibility to and fuel the initiative with their personal social capital.

In early stages, team formation should prioritize individuals instead of institutions, and team building must be a priority. The group should outlive political cycles and must be deeply rooted in civil society, its diverse institutions and entities, and their leaders. The group should start small and grow over time. Stakeholder mapping, team building, and future visioning are among the tools that could be used.

The coalition can assume different shapes and formats over time. In the beginning, it can be an informal group of leaders. As the initiative grows, the group can continue to work as a networked organization, but some sort of secretariat and formal relationship with local authorities may be needed. Eventually, in a later stage, the group can assume a more formal posture and even establish a new entity to bring different stakeholders under its umbrella.

But what should the group do to advance innovation and drive the transformation of local and regional economies? What practical steps should leaders take? Below, building on the expertise and insights from the GFCC community, we offer 10 practical recommendations that any region can follow. For each step, suggestions about tools that could be used are included and mapped to the GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles.

10 Practical Steps to Advance Place-Based Innovation

1. Understand the reality on the ground

Strategies to advance local and regional innovation must be based on a solid understanding of the assets on hand — natural, talent, technology, infrastructure, capital, industry, and government capabilities. To identify and assess these assets for their potential, stakeholders need to combine extensive local and regional mapping with strategic thinking.

Mapping efforts should cover all sectors (industry, education, the research community, government, and civil society), key aspects of the micro and macroeconomic environments, other key dimensions (infrastructure, legal frameworks, skills availability, industry capabilities, capital), and key stakeholders, their linkages, and relationships.

The understanding of future possibilities and potential trajectories for the local and regional economy should also be informed by the national and global scenario, market and social trends, and expected technology developments.

Tools

- Regional and cluster mapping
- Stakeholder mapping
- Business and policy benchmarking
- Technology and business foresight
- Social media mapping
-

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 1, 10

2. Create a roadmap for future growth

The roadmap should envision a sequence of future states for the regional and local economy, identify key milestones and expected results related to key drivers for future growth: innovation, sustainability, inclusiveness, resilience, and partnerships. It should also be based on the understanding of local and regional realities, the key technology, societal, and market trends shaping industries worldwide (such as digitalization, automation, changing demographics, and energy transition), and gaps to be filled in the local and regional economy (such as skills or access to venture capital). Ideally, it should result from a combination of top-down analysis and the synthesis of bottom-up contributions from the local and regional community.

The roadmap must clearly identify gaps to fill, and set targets to achieve and metrics to track progress along the way. Digital tools can be used to gather, systematize, synthesize, and communicate stakeholder input, contributions, and proposals.

More than a final product, the roadmap should be a dynamic tool for engagement and mobilization of local stakeholders. It can start simple and be expanded as the initiative gains momentum.

Tools

- Design thinking
- Strategic planning
- Scenario planning
- Open innovation
- Social media communications
- Strategic communications
- Requests for information, virtual and in-person local hearings and town halls

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 1, 2, 10

3. Put a special action team in charge

Transformation requires action, and any strategy can succeed only if coupled with continuous and diligent implementation efforts. It is essential to have a highly skilled, agile, and empowered team of public entrepreneurs charged with strategy implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

This special action team should be formed by professionals with backgrounds in government, the private sector, and other relevant areas of economic, industrial and innovation expertise, selected through a competitive process. They should operate in an agile fashion and have direct access to city and regional leaders, and work in close partnership with public-private partnerships, public administration, business and industry groups, and civil society.

Among other things, the team should connect project management with governance, identify funding sources, develop proposals for projects and investments that advance regional capabilities and capacity that underpin economic development and innovation broadly, keep track of results, tell relevant stories, continually assess impacts, execute benchmarking, work across government, catalyze innovation in public administration, give visibility to key achievements, and energize the process.

Tools

- Leadership and entrepreneurship training
- Teams and task forces that work at the edge of organizations to drive innovation
- Empowerment, special recognition, and visibility to emerging leaders
- Shared governance with civil society
- Lean project management
- Objectives and Key results (OKRs) framework

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 2, 3, 7, 10

4. Use all available resources to advance innovation

There are a variety of resources and funding sources that could support local, and regional innovation strategies and projects – from national government financing in the form of loans and grants to overseas development assistance (ODA), from private sector investment to matching and seed funds provided by multilateral organizations.

A fundamental task of the special action team will be to identify, map, understand, and select funding opportunities to explore, developing the projects and applications for which they will seek funding and other resources. This could include identifying sources of support for projects and investments at the local and regional level, using the resources they provide, and sharing that information.

The goals should be to maximize the capital available for project implementation, and to identify and develop mechanisms to leverage all other relevant resources that could be used to support entrepreneurs, industry, and strategy implementation.

Tools

- Funding opportunity mapping
- Project funding strategy
- Relationship building with funding program decision-makers and managers
- Engaging legislative bodies and their authorizers and appropriators
- Project planning matrix
- Project finance
- Public-private partnerships –various models
- Blended finance
- Stakeholder mapping
- Cluster mapping to identify gaps in capability or capacity, and assets to leverage
- Project, technical assistance, and entrepreneurial support mapping
- Innovation portal with information on resources available and funding opportunities
- Templates for funding proposals and public-private partnerships.

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 1, 2, 7

5. Reduce friction and encourage entrepreneurship

A low-friction business environment lowers the costs of doing business, eases capital and labor flows in the economy as new businesses form and grow and others decline, makes entrepreneurship easier, enables businesses to respond more quickly to the market, reduces litigation and government costs, and builds trust between government and industry. In the end, it creates a competitive advantage and is a key driver of investment, higher productivity, and economic growth.

A low-friction business environment results from a combination of well-engineered legal frameworks, transparent and clear regulation, efficient and integrated public services, fast and trusted conflict resolution mechanisms, but also economic sophistication and business efficiency, as any economy depends on a variety of high-quality products and services supplied at speed and globally competitive costs.

Building a low friction economy also encompasses a physical dimension, as goods and people need to move around efficiently, quickly, at low cost and without waste — it requires efficient infrastructure.

Tools

- Business process engineering
- Government digitalization
- Skills development in government administration
- Innovation sandboxes
- Smart contracts that are digitalized and use block chain technology
- Special legal regimes and courts
- Innovation and competitiveness advocacy
- Policy benchmarking
- Regulatory impact assessment with support of AI and digital technologies
- Continuous regulatory review, improvement, and reform
- Strategic planning
- Urban planning
- Advanced labor market information and job placement services

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 1, 5, 7,10

6. Make your infrastructure a factor of success

Economies need different types of infrastructure to function and for innovation to flourish. This includes physical and soft infrastructure, including data sets, connectivity, and platforms for dialogue.

The task is bigger than deploying infrastructure. It starts with understanding which infrastructure investments can best contribute to the region's future growth, and includes putting in place coalitions, legal frameworks, and business models to allow for shared use, or even shared ownership, of critical infrastructure in the region. Examples of relevant shared infrastructure include training and testing facilities, laboratories, co-working spaces, and non-proprietary data sets; the availability of open or shared data can help accelerate technology development for digital companies and even attract new ventures to the city and region.

Regions that want to be globally competitive must be connected internationally and have in place the infrastructure needed for that.

Tools

- Cluster mapping
- Assets mapping
- Innovation assets portal
- Entrepreneurship center
- Manufacturing extension programs
- Agricultural extension programs
- Co-working spaces
- City and regional government open data repositories
- Public data lakes available to local innovators and industry — “data commons”
- Pre-competitive research centers
- Infrastructure investment regimes
- Connected and smart infrastructure — roads, water, energy, etc.
- Super high-speed and low-latency internet
- Affordable internet connectivity programs
- Regulatory frameworks to support telework and online learning

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 1, 6, 8

7. Create connections to accelerate innovation

Innovation requires cross-sector collaboration and calls stakeholders in all sectors to get to know each other and work together. The engagement of stakeholders in innovation ecosystems cannot be relegated to chance, but rather calls for intentional efforts and purposeful investments. Regional and local teams working to advance innovation must actively invest and work to connect players.

There is an urgent need for tools to encourage more circulation of professionals across sectors, such as industry fellowship schemes for university professors and industry practitioners teaching part-time at universities. It is essential to have people in academia with experience in industry, professionals in industry with experience in government, and so forth. Legislation should be adapted to allow and incentivize the circulation of resources across sectors, including capital, equipment, IP, expertise, professionals, etc.

University laboratories should be accessible to local entrepreneurs and industry. Teams charged with advancing local and regional innovation must serve as conveners and connectors, identify key barriers to circulation and work with national government to update legislation to minimize them, create physical spaces and programs to foster partnerships, and build legal frameworks for PPPs.

Tools

- Stakeholder mapping
- Innovation policy benchmarking
- PPP legislation and repository of contract templates for use in technology projects
- Fellowship programs
- Industry practitioner programs at universities
- Industry internship for faculty and students
- Industry mentorship of aspiring entrepreneurs
- Experiential entrepreneurship programs for research scientists and engineers
- Innovation hubs
- Innovation festivals
- Innovator networks
- Innovation policy advocacy

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 1, 2, 7

8. Nurture an innovative talent pool

Human capital is the primary factor driving long term growth. Building the future economy depends on developing, attracting, and retaining talent. Local and regional governments must partner with industry, universities, education providers, and civil society in a structured way to develop and implement education and skills development initiatives, which should focus on hard and soft skills, use contemporary instructional models, and highlight digital capabilities and skills.

Mentorship, entrepreneurship training, and apprenticeship programs can simultaneously contribute to skills development, job market insertion, and the development of cross-sector relationships; and offering citizens life-long learning opportunities enables regions to better evolve and transition their economies more smoothly.

Cities and regions that want to be globally competitive should also invest to become nodes in global talent networks, sending students abroad and attracting global talent. To do that, they can combine outbound (foreign language training, study abroad programs, etc.) and inbound initiatives (global promotion, attraction of foreign direct investment in R&D and global universities, vouchers for companies to hire global talent, etc.).

Tools

- Multi-sector workforce board
- Skills development alliances
- 2nd and 3rd language education programs
- Digital skills training programs
- Industrial apprenticeship programs
- Skills portals
- Skills vouchers
- Study abroad programs
- Incentives for FDI in R&D
- Partnerships with global universities
- Mentorship programs
- Business acceleration programs

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 3, 9

9. Focus on high value-added industries and quality of life

Cities and regions that want to advance innovation and transform their economies need to align investments with those goals. They should simultaneously support innovation and transformation in traditional industries, and direct resources to investments in critical capabilities needed to leverage future technologies and build and grow new industries (knowledge-intensive, high value-added, sustainable, with future growth prospects, digitally enabled), ignite entrepreneurship, and improve the quality of life. Loans, grants, infrastructure investments, and tax incentive should be tuned to reflect such priorities.

Instead of choosing companies, cities and regions must consider entrepreneurship in general and specific challenges, technology areas, and industries that present high-growth potential. Investments should serve to lower barriers to entry into new industries, put in place critical shared infrastructure, develop the talent pool, and connect globally. At the same time, investments in increasing the productivity of natural resources and improving the quality of life can boost productivity, and are instrumental to attracting and retaining talent and FDI.

A focus on sustainable energy and infrastructure bridges the two worlds, as those tend to be high-paying and non-pollutant business areas that make life better for communities. Public investments in transportation, affordable and energy-efficient housing, healthcare, and livable urban spaces are essential to attract young talent and entrepreneurs from across the globe, and can be used to accelerate future and sustainable industries. Cities and regions can create special regulatory frameworks to allow for experimentation with new technologies and business models, and leverage their global positions through those.

Tools

- Urban planning for sustainability
- City innovation challenges
- Public procurement
- Project finance
- Matching grants
- Tax incentives
- Regional investment funds
- Public private partnerships
- City green bonds
- Innovation sandboxes
- FDI promotion office

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 2, 6, 7, 8

10. Position your regional strengths on the global stage

Cities and regions must act on purpose to position themselves on the global stage. They need to craft and promote brands that distinguish them globally, reflecting their local and regional characteristics, the assets they have on hand, and the place's future growth roadmap.

Global connectivity — for cargo, travel, and data — is essential for any city or region that wants to position globally, and investments should take that into account. The city or region needs to task a team with promoting it globally and, depending on the scale of its economy and maturity of global connections, it can consider opening investment offices abroad, potentially in partnership with other players, to keep costs low.

Cities and regions can implement, at relatively low-cost, programs and soft infrastructure such as a diaspora network, a global ambassadorship program, and the like to connect globally and raise awareness of the place. But they should be cognizant that such programs require travel, a consistent and regular event agenda, and constant animation. On the inbound side, they can implement concierge services for global companies and innovators, and make a physical and virtual landing pad available for people who want to come visit, discover, and/or set up operations in the region.

Tools

- City and regional brand
- Global ambassadorship program
- Diaspora network
- FDI promotion office
- Global events
- Global landing pads

GFCC Global Competitiveness Principles: 9

Putting Ideas Into Action

There is a need for purposeful action to advance innovation and we call for stakeholders at all levels to play a role in that. National policy stakeholders must contribute to advancing place-based innovation and should put in place national frameworks to support regional and local initiatives. But it is up to regional and local stakeholders to take the lead, build the necessary coalitions, put ideas into action, and implement concrete initiatives to make change happen on the ground.

The recommendations in this Call to Action arise from the knowledge accumulated over the years and the work of the GFCC across six continents. We thank all leaders who contributed to this effort and, particularly, to those who reviewed and provided direct input to this document.

For more information about the work of the GFCC and how our organization can support you in translating this Call to Action into initiatives on the ground, please contact GFCC Executive Director, Roberto Alvarez (ralvarez@thegfcc.org).

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The GFCC is a global multi-stakeholder membership organization founded in 2010 with a footprint spanning more than 30 nations. The GFCC is committed to disseminating best practices to accelerate productivity, growth and prosperity for countries, regions, and cities. We do that through high-level networking and events, in-depth conversations, analytical tools, advice, and education.

GFCC members include private sector councils on competitiveness and industry organizations, government agencies, global corporations, and leading research universities. All members pay membership dues yearly to secure their placement in the network. Currently, the GFCC hosts 49 members from 21 countries.

Besides its members, the GFCC network also includes experts invited to participate as fellows. Members and fellows have different roles. Fellows contribute by sharing their specialized knowledge and expertise with the community and participating in project development and strategies. Currently, the GFCC hosts 55 fellows from 21 countries.

Learn more about the GFCC at: www.thegfcc.org

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