

GCRO Five-Year Strategic Framework 2020-2025

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1. Introduction

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) is a unique partnership between two universities (the Universities of Johannesburg (UJ) and the Witwatersrand (Wits)), the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) and organised local government (SALGA) in Gauteng. The GCRO was established as a research agency with the brief to generate insight and understanding on the Gauteng City-Region (GCR) for use by government agencies and civil society to inform governance and development across the city-region.

Established in late 2008, the GCRO has grown over the past 12 years and now has a staff complement of 19 and an established repertoire of research outputs and government support activities. It has become a respected research organisation operating at the interface between scholarly research and government policy. In essence, the GCRO:

- Delivers independent research on the city-region;
- Networks with other research institutions;
- Produces academic publications and pursues academic engagement;
- Produces policy-relevant and accessible publications based on its research;
- Provides briefings, advice and other services to government partners; and
- Acts as an intermediary that brings together key stakeholders.

The GCRO receives core funding from the GPG and in-kind support from the two universities. An important principle of the partnership is the scholarly independence of the GCRO, which nevertheless remains responsive and sensitive to the preoccupations of government in the city-region. This ‘embedded autonomy’ and the consistent, inflation-linked funding from the GPG are often referenced as among the key factors contributing to the GCRO’s success.

The GCRO is not value-neutral – it is a progressive institution that seeks to see realised the ideals of the South African Constitution, and therefore pursues inclusion, equality, tolerance, non-racialism, non-sexism and related values. This is reflected in how the GCR is envisioned as a growing and dynamic urban region. Through better planning and management, and in particular through improved cooperative government relations, the GCRO contributes to the building of a city-region that is functionally integrated, spatially coherent, economically vibrant, innovative, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive.

This broad mandate to provide policy support to government is complemented by the academic mandate to promote intellectual enquiry on various aspects of the city-region. The GCRO is thus neither solely a policy think-tank/research unit, nor a traditional academic department. We are a research centre built for purpose, namely to undertake peer-reviewed research of the highest academic standard to help governments of the day (in different spheres) to better understand policy challenges and approaches, strategies for meeting current and future needs, programme options, and so on. Although we offer academic metrics of success, our policy-relevant outputs in all forms (from occasional papers to strategy documents to ‘maps of the month’) are equally important metrics of success.

The broad mandate of the GCRO has thus been expressed through several specific roles, which have developed over time:

- **Data analytics, data infrastructure, data visualisations, indicators and benchmarks.** The GCRO is responsible for collecting and hosting strategically useful data, conducting surveys, developing new data sources, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and analysis work, and the assembly of information into innovative data products. These activities are aligned with the strategic policy support provided by the GCRO and form part of the necessary research base required for the GCRO's medium- to longer-term applied research.
- **Strategic policy support work.** The GCRO provides direct assistance to government through policy development support, or short- to medium-term work on commissioned and/or requested analytical reports.
- **Medium- to longer-term applied research.** Either on request from government or through self-initiated projects, the GCRO will continue to function as a leading research centre by producing more in-depth, analytically complex research of relevance to strategic decision-making on how best to build the city-region. Where possible, this research will align with various GCR vision and strategy documents and, where relevant, focus on immediate and pressing policy concerns.
- **Platforms for engagement between government and the academy.** The GCRO develops structures, processes and interventions to connect government to academic expertise in order to help academic specialists reach decision-makers if their work has policy relevance. The role of the GCRO is to create and host the necessary platforms – such as symposia, seminars, workshops, CityLabs and strategic dialogues – to assist government, in partnership with business and civil society stakeholders, to determine the society-wide research and knowledge production needs of the city-region. To determine these needs, the GCRO will assist with the formation of research groups around areas of interest that government and the academy have in common.
- **Partnerships and network building.** The GCRO works on the core principle that open-ended sharing of data and information between partners and citizens (in civil society organisations and as individuals) is critical for improved knowledge production by all. We therefore work to build partnerships and knowledge-sharing networks within the universities, across relevant parts of government and between government, academia and a wide array of research bodies operating in the region and beyond. This includes collaborations with urban observatories in other parts of South Africa and the world. Where possible, the GCRO will host interns, visiting academics, post-doctoral researchers and government specialists to enhance the academic partnerships and networking capacity of the GCRO.
- **Academic contributions.** Applied research is important, but over the longer term the most significant advances in understanding the city-region will come from research driven by enquiry applied to the mission of an equitable and inclusive GCR, not the need for immediate policy answers. In addition to its government support functions, the GCRO will be a locus of intellectual enquiry and exchange through the production of academic publications, the hosting of seminars and colloquia, targeted teaching, presentations at academic conferences and events, and the provision of space for government specialists or visiting local or international researchers to reflect on developments in the city-region. The GCRO will

increasingly have to look to funding high-level global exchanges and Fellowships to attract global city thinkers to share their knowledge with academics and policy-makers in the GCR.

All of the above occurs in a global context of dramatically heightened urbanisation and concomitant resource constraints and rights abuses (as some individuals, and some states, seek to protect what they see as 'theirs' from 'foreigners', and so on). The GCRO has now built a base of data that facilitates engagement with the major global urban debates and the key institutions driving those debates.

2. Process for developing the Strategic Framework

The GCRO process to develop the Strategic Framework for 2020 to 2025 commenced with a number of strategic workshops for all staff in April 2019. A detailed Self-Review Report, jointly developed by all GCRO staff in June/July 2019, served as a resource document for the External Review Panel (which convened in August 2019), and for the GCRO's own five-yearly strategic planning phase. The 2019 Self-Review Report provides an overview and summary of notable trends in the organisation, and the key research initiatives and thematic areas addressed in recent years. This draft of the 2020–2025 Strategic Framework takes the 2019 Self-Review Report as read and will not rehearse material already covered there.

An External Review Panel of uniquely skilled and experienced individuals was convened in August 2019. The Panel members reflected on the recent performance of the GCRO (over the past three to five years especially) and the ways in which its role is taking on new dimensions, and provided considered advice on the strategic directions and priorities for the future. The Panel engaged with interviewees drawn from the public sector and academic institutions, all of whom had worked with the GCRO and were therefore well placed to comment on the organisation, both in terms of its intellectual and policy contributions, but also its broader impact. The observations and recommendations provided in the External Review Report have been taken into consideration, and many of the measures noted in this Strategic Framework are aligned with this valuable 2019 Report.

All staff members of the GCRO were recruited into various processes aimed at producing the new Strategic Framework. Detailed work packages were determined by GCRO staff, and several workshops, meetings, written analyses and action plans were jointly developed to address priorities for the GCRO's mandate and responsibilities, culture and values, external audiences and partners, the research output production delivery chain, geoinformatics, and the principles for the future GCRO organisational structure. Extensive debate and collective participation resulted in the formulation of the GCRO's research agenda as a series of 'themes'. The products of the various work teams were debated at the GCRO strategic breakaway with all staff in October 2019 and concluded in a series of workshops soon thereafter.

The full GCRO team has thus participated in one way or another in co-creating iterations of the strategy, structure and future research programme for the GCRO. The GCRO's new Five-Year Strategic Framework 2020–2025 involves some important modifications (see below) and the success of these arrangements will be closely monitored and adjusted as necessary in the spirit of a 'fractal organisation' that seeks to be responsive and adaptive.

3. Context for strategic renewal

In the five years since the last phase of strategic planning, there have been several significant developments in both the external context in which the GCRO is embedded and within the GCRO itself. While there is much in the GCRO's previous strategic plan that remains relevant (and some continuities will be evident in this new framework), important modifications are required in how we position and align ourselves in our context, and in how we make the best use of our resources to advance our purposes.

External context

Over the past five years, the global emphasis on the urban as a critical site for the attainment of development goals has sharpened, with the adoption of the New Urban Agenda in 2016 and the urban-specific objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, South Africa has affirmed the salience of cities in our development agenda and for advancing the prosperity of our populations. The National Spatial Development Framework and the Integrated Urban Development Framework are national policies framed to give effect to these purposes, requiring local government to respond with appropriate plans and approaches. Most recently, the new Medium Term Strategic Framework has signalled that, in addition to a general emphasis on the urban as a priority for development attention, approaches to the city-region scale of planning should now be achieved in selected regions, including Gauteng.

But even as insight deepens about the possibilities that cities represent as engines of growth, prosperity and social mobility, so does the concern about the alternate possibility of poorly managed cities becoming sinks of despair and deprivation. Urban agglomerations are not naturally sites of beneficent growth, especially when they are the destination of large numbers of poor migrants, and the city authorities have limited resources to expand the urban fabric. Indeed, we have learned in recent years how the capabilities of local government are extremely uneven, with, on the one hand, some track-records of remarkably consistent levels of service delivery despite expanding populations, with, on the other, dismaying reports from the Auditor General on the failures of governance performance and integrity. Certainly, our urban areas continue to experience high levels of community protests, as well as xenophobic violence, crime and other disruptions that reflect desperation and the competition for resources. It is clear a fresh vision is needed for the role of urbanism in addressing inequality and poverty, and in providing much stronger opportunities for social mobility and distributed prosperity. Giving effect to such a vision will require not only a systemic view of how the various functions of government can work in aligned or integrated ways to create the enabling conditions for productive urban societies, but also the sophisticated capabilities (including human and fiscal strength) within the state to give effect to such models.

It is evident the state's appetite for the services of an organisation like the GCRO grows steadily, and we respond to an ever-growing volume of calls for research insights, advice and other services. At the same time, we are sharply aware of the limits to our responsive capacities, both because the size and complexity of some of the problems government must address are beyond the modest resources of the GCRO alone, but also because there are limits to the capacity within the state to make use of research such as ours to inform decision-making.

In summary, the urban agenda has been affirmed globally, nationally and locally – providing the most auspicious normative climate for advancing city-level development imperatives. However, there are significant limitations on the knowledge resources available to provide the in-depth insight required for local-level urban design, and some modification in government capacity is likely to be needed for the levels of innovation that are entailed.

During the planning phase of this Strategic Framework, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic began to emerge and, from March 2020, support for (especially) the Gauteng Provincial Government related to COVID-19 has been provided by a large multi-disciplinary team within the GCRO. The value of having a dedicated urban research entity of this nature, and the accumulated work of the past decade, became immediately apparent with the production of various outputs that provided spatially specific guidance to government on where the highest levels of vulnerability were likely to be. This has been followed by: other pandemic-relevant outputs (especially data-insights and maps); advice on pandemic planning scenarios; assistance in thinking through improved systems for data analytics; and media articles and interviews.

Internal context

Since drafting the previous strategic plan, the GCRO has experienced some important shifts in its size, the complexity of its focus areas and the reach of its work, each of which has implications for how we frame our research priorities and how we configure our organisational resources to fulfil our purposes.

First, our staff complement has grown significantly over the past five years (from 12 to 19 staff members), with the inevitable staff turnover in the intervening years as well. The influx of fresh talent has grown both the volume of work being produced as well as the breadth of research focus. Our increasingly diverse staff (now with more black South Africans than ever before) enables enquiry into a wider range of priority questions, and a deepening richness in our collective output. At the same time, this has implications for the levels of oversight, quality assurance and project management needed to sustain the exceptional production values for which the GCRO has become known.

Second, our partners in government increasingly express the need for insight into the massively complex socio-economic systems that structure the fortunes of urban citizens – issues of economy, governance, social cohesion, water security, crime and violence, systems of innovation, etc. These priority focus areas cannot be addressed exclusively through the GCRO's relatively limited resources, and we have more frequently needed to form multi-partnered consortia of researchers to make progress in these domains. Working in networked mode can be greatly rewarding, but also requires distinctive skills, alternative funding sources and the patience for deferred outcomes. Whether we work with networks or simpler partnerships, a very great deal of the GCRO's work involves the brokerage with external partners and players, with considerable implications for our skills base, and certainly for the contractual relationships that must be administered (with the volume of transactions processed in our finance division having increased tenfold in recent years).

Third, the GCRO's spheres of influence have commanded our particular attention in at least two important ways. In the academic sphere, we have consciously and deliberately sought to position

ourselves within the local and international networks of urban policy researchers in order to ensure that we learn from the best nationally and globally, and that our work receives the acknowledgement it deserves. Pleasingly, this is paying dividends and the GCRO is now increasingly invited by local bodies and international multilateral agencies to present not only our work, but also the distinctive partnership model that we represent. The importance of our links with the flourishing international urban policy research community cannot be underestimated since this is where the leading levels of analysis, methodology and comparative work is exchanged, ensuring the currency of the GCRO's work and our advice to our partners in government. Then, with respect to our sphere of influence within government, our reach has deepened significantly in some key domains. Growing relationships of trust and confidence have resulted in GCRO staffers becoming involved in government processes and assisting with key initiatives. This success, however, has further illustrated the extent of the need for structured engagement with government agencies, not least to assist in building the capacity for evidence-informed decision-making. The GCRO will need to devise methods for efficient and effective modes of engagement (especially, but not only) with local government to deepen the reciprocal exchanges of insight and the co-production of better-informed urban design. The resource challenges of this avenue of work are significant, not to mention the potential for over-extending our skill-set.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made these internal GCRO shifts more complex, with the full team working remotely and all work programmes (including the strategic planning processes) pushed out to address the pandemic's impacts on the GCR and especially on its most vulnerable residents.

4. Implications of the contextual shifts

These three extensions of the GCRO's conditions – size, complexity and reach – have together required rethinking our internal organisation in a number of ways, including our management arrangements, our working processes, the job descriptions of the senior layer, and certain assumptions about our organisational culture.

Our self-review processes, conducted throughout 2019, have demonstrated ever-more clearly the complex entailments of our position in the research–policy nexus. GCRO staff must face in three directions simultaneously: 1) publishing scholarly research in academic circles; 2) producing policy-relevant material for government and wider audiences and responding to the day-to-day requests for assistance from our government partners; and 3) contributing to the changing repertoire of GCRO functions as the organisation responds to changing circumstances and innovates into the future.

Similarly, we have conducted much closer analyses of what is required in our various production processes. The production of high-quality research in the first instance involves appropriate forms of guidance and oversight at various points along the way, and the requisite peer-review processes later on. Then, the processes involved in taking a GCRO output towards publication include the multiple iterative exchanges between visualisation specialists, designers, copy-editors and the authors to ensure the final product is lucid, accurate and maximally accessible to wide audiences. It has been easy to underestimate the very exacting and time-intensive demands required by these processes. We have come to realise that the division-of-labour for some functions was disproportionately accumulating around certain individuals. We needed to achieve a better balance across (especially) the senior layers of researchers while also acknowledging the need to strengthen the presence of experienced senior colleagues who can take on research leadership, mentoring and peak quality assurance. Our production strategy requires several simultaneous approaches:

- A tightening of the definition of our research priorities, and the responsibilities for their oversight;
- A re-arrangement of our management structures and responsibilities;
- A clarification and extension of senior-level responsibilities among researchers;
- An appraisal and re-statement of the organisational culture that sustains the GCRO; and
- Recruitment of additional strength to the GCRO in priority areas.

5. Strategic Framework

Note on terminology

Strategic planning and evaluation can be a semantic minefield. For the purposes of this document, we are using four terms: goals, actions, outcomes and indicators.

Goals are high-level statements of intent as to where the GCRO wants to be in 2025 – they represent the destination. **Actions** unpack the goals into more detailed steps (the journey). **Outcomes** reflect the desired state in 2025. **Indicators** are ‘markers’ that will show if we are on track and have delivered.

We focus here on the goals the GCRO needs to achieve by 2025 that are different from the achievements we have made to date. These new goals, actions and outcomes are therefore strategic by definition. We will not restate our mandate or our raison d’être in our new goals – these are taken as given.

Mission

The GCRO provides robust information, data, analysis and reflective evaluation which allows for the setting of clear strategic agendas that are shared across the three spheres of government, academia, and business and civil society counterparts, so that there is better planning, management and improved cooperative government relations in order to contribute to a city-region that is functionally integrated, spatially coherent, economically vibrant, innovative, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. To deliver on this mission, the GCRO can be understood as a system, as presented in the figure below and further explained in the text that follows.

Figure 1: The GCRO system



The GCRO system is about the co-production and dissemination of knowledge to address the city-region's pressing needs (socio-economic, environmental, etc.) and, as such, incorporates several domains:

- **Strategy** and overall direction.
- **Resourcing.** The resources the GCRO employs, its finances and people (human capital) and the facilities and in-kind contributions from Wits and UJ.
- **Delivery.** The GCRO follows a standard set of steps to deliver its various products.
- **Research programmes.** The different research programmes are a way of organising GCRO projects into thematic areas. Projects either respond to demand (with respect to the immediate, short- and medium-term priorities of government) or they are proactive contributions to the medium- to longer-term contribution to global theorisation around urban issues.
- **Dissemination.** The research products are disseminated among the GCRO's audiences using different methods and 'pathways'.
- **Audiences.** GCRO audiences are grouped into four categories: government; academia; global peers (with a distinction between African and other international partners); and media and civil society.
- Underlying these domains, as the GCRO's foundation, are the ways it organises its people (**organisational form**), the **values** it rests on and the **behaviours** of its staff – which together create the **culture** of the GCRO.

The goals, actions and outcomes are presented within the parameters of this Strategic Framework to articulate where GCRO wants to be in 2025.

6. Goals for 2025

Nine goals have been identified to guide the GCRO on its journey to 2025. These goals highlight the changes and improvements that the GCRO wants to effect over the next five years and are presented relative to components of the GCRO system highlighted in the previous section.

Resourcing: Financial and human capital

While the GCRO has a need for considerable additional capacity, it must still work within its existing resource envelope. Important advances have been made recently in the recruitment of senior management capacity to oversee operations and partnerships, and structured internship programmes have provided invaluable assistance to both the GIS operation and the Quality of Life Survey.

Further capacity is needed in the most senior research layers, and recruitment of a further Principal Researcher will commence in 2021. The capacity in GIS/geoinformatics needs to be consolidated for the future, both in terms of person-power and in skills development, especially to achieve the levels of added sophistication we know are within reach. A strategy is currently underway to this end.

We are delighted with the grants from the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) that are intended to strengthen partnership capacity in economy-related areas. The establishment of a Research Chair – either within a Gauteng-based university or preferably within the GCRO itself – is planned to provide strong leadership on the ‘inclusive economy’, which is a vital strategic area.

Our goals for the next five years in this domain relate to our financial and human capital, and are articulated in the table below.

Goals 1 and 2: Resourcing: Financial and human capital

High-level GOAL statement	What we hope to achieve by 2025 (OUTCOMES)	How we get there (ACTIONS)
1) To maintain good relationships with our primary funder while exploring other core funding opportunities	a) The GCRO will have diversified its funding sources	i) Develop a financial sustainability strategy for the GCRO
2) To strategically hire staff in key areas of need and build the ‘brains trust’	a) The GCRO will have hired top level professionals in key strategic areas, e.g. the regional economy	i) Finalise the inclusive economies chair opportunity with the GPG

	b) The GCRO will have increased the number of top-rated academic (PhDs and NRF-rated researchers) and policy experts	i) Create incentives to reward excellence in academic, policy, data and support areas
		ii) Revise promotions criteria policy to reward academic excellence and co-production with government
		iii) Integrate academic and policy work
		iv) Decide on the optimal balance between government and academic work
	c) The GCRO will have enabled the academic progression of its research staff	i) Revise promotions criteria policy to reward academic excellence and co-production with government
d) The GCRO will have diversified the racial and gender profile of its staff	i) Actively recruit people of colour and women into senior positions	
e) The GCRO will have retained and expanded its internship programme	i) Develop a formal GCRO internship policy and programme	

Delivery - the production process

The GCRO's production process has seen a marked improvement over the past year. The intention is not to 'scale up production' but rather to make marginal improvements to an already substantially efficient production process. The goals for the next five years are reflected in the table below.

Goal 3: Delivery and the production process

High-level GOAL statement	What we hope to achieve by 2025 (OUTCOMES)	How we get there (ACTIONS)
3) To improve the rate of research throughput and ensure stringent quality standards	a) The GCRO is an efficient ‘self-publishing house’ characterised by systematic production processes and excellent quality	i) The GCRO will introduce and continue to refine a system for understanding and codifying the various stages of the production process and mapping all outputs under production against these stages

Research priorities

The broad research themes identified by the GCRO in previous strategic plans have proved to be resiliently salient, informed by both local imperatives and global preoccupations in the urban domain. However, while several longer-term projects were initiated in the last five years to research these themes, it has not always been clear – or clearly communicated – how the outputs of discrete projects connect with one another to achieve a progressive accumulation of policy-relevant knowledge in relation to a particular set of issues. Five years later, it is certainly clear which projects and outputs have been completed in relation to, for example, the ‘governance’ or ‘social fabric’ themes, but it is not completely clear how all the work in each of these themes – when added up – has systematically built insights and evidence that significantly deepen a line of argument originally set out for this domain of research.

Accordingly, we have sought to define clearer thematic polestars for individual research projects, and we will expect projects at their outset, and their conclusion, to distil the contributions that they are making to one or more relevant thematically defined research programmes. Concomitantly, we will seek to lead each programme of research more deliberately, with the roles and responsibilities for researcher leadership in each theme being clarified over time.

The nine thematically focused programmes of research for the 2020–2025 period are:

1. Poverty, inequality and social mobility
2. Quality of life
3. Spatial transformation
4. Inclusive economies
5. Governance agenda for the GCR
6. Histories and futures of the GCR
7. Sustainability and just transitions

8. Social change
9. Data analytics, informatics and visualisation

It is through these nine research programmes that we aim to build both our own knowledge base and that of our audiences. This remains a key goal over the next five years. The GCRO is also paying special attention to expanding the current role of GIS from being service orientated to becoming a research output in its own right.

The nine programmes are currently in the process of being more tightly defined, and clear targets for each year of the five-year strategy will be defined at the beginning of the relevant year.

Goals 4 and 5: Research priorities

High-level GOAL statement	What we hope to achieve by 2025 (OUTCOMES)	How we get there (ACTIONS)
4) To build the knowledge base of our audience and ourselves by producing high quality primary data and evidence-based research outputs within our programmes of research	a) The GCRO is regarded as a leading global city-region observatory	i) Set appropriate targets for the different research programmes and projects
		ii) GCRO data governance will be consistent with the nine principles of its data governance strategy
5) To expand the current GIS role from being service orientated to becoming a research output in its own right	a) The GCRO is a centre of geo-informatics excellence and GIS support to the standard of leading data visualisation organisations in the world, such as the University of Chicago Centre for Spatial Data Science, the University College London Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis and Brown University	i) Develop a strategy to expand and appropriately resource GIS at the GCRO

Dissemination and partners

The GCRO currently engages with its partners/audiences through mailshots, social media, ‘maps of the month’, workshops and presentations. An example of a key engagement with partners and audiences has been the launch of the GCRO Quality of Life Survey findings, to which representatives of our diplomatic and productive partners are invited. Among the attendees is the Premier of Gauteng Province. Furthermore, members of the media are invited to cover the launch. Thus, the Quality of Life Survey’s key findings are disseminated to an audience that extends beyond the academic and political audiences who are directly interested.

Over the next five years, the GCRO needs to prioritise using more channels to increase communication with a broader network of partners and audiences. A suggestion has included placing a greater emphasis on social media engagements with a greater number of partners and audiences; these engagements can then be observed by other potential audiences with whom we have not directly engaged.

The key question we need to ask ourselves is whom we want to serve/influence over the next five years. Progress has been made by the consolidation of dissemination tasks as they relate to GCRO outputs, and by the implementation of a new organisational responsibility in the form of dissemination oversight and management, particularly to ensure GCRO outputs are more accessible on online platforms such as Google Scholar and Digital Object Identifier (DOI) databases.

Goal 6: Dissemination and partners

High-level GOAL statement	What we hope to achieve by 2025 (OUTCOMES)	How we get there (ACTIONS)
6) To improve methods of dissemination to our network of partners and audiences	a) The GCRO’s research outputs reach a broader national and international audience	i) Understanding of who our partners and stakeholders are
		ii) Developing tailor-made methods of dissemination to stakeholders and partners (especially municipalities)

GCRO audiences

The GCRO’s uniqueness lies in its location at the nexus of academic and policy work. This creates a relational imperative – to bridge between these two ‘worlds’, GCRO staff not only have to equip themselves with the skills required for such a role and but also to build trust-based relationships with both the academy and government. Over the next five years, the GCRO will focus on building relationships with key stakeholders to effectively perform its intermediary role.

Goal 7: GCRO audiences

High-level GOAL statement	What we hope to achieve by 2025 (OUTCOMES)	How we get there (ACTIONS)
7) To expand and deepen our intermediary role	a) The GCRO has deepened its trust-based relationships with its partners and stakeholders	i) Developing a wider range of appropriate means of engagement and exchange with our different stakeholders and partners
	b) The GCRO plays a key intermediary role between academic and policy domains	i) Convening engagements and exchanges between stakeholders to seek responses to complex challenges facing the GCR

Organisational form, behaviours, values and culture

The preceding seven goals rest on the GCRO's ability to develop the requisite organisational form and to foster an appropriate organisational culture (which is an expression of individual values and behaviours), one that provides a sense of trustworthiness and comfort as expressed through the next two goals.

Goals 8 and 9: Organisational form, behaviours, values and culture

High-level GOAL statement	What we hope to achieve by 2025 (OUTCOMES)	How we get there (ACTIONS)
8) To develop an organisational form appropriate to our needs	a) The GCRO's organisational form continues to enable and strengthen mixed teams, increasingly distributed decision-making, requiring clear roles and responsibilities and accountability	i) Reconfigure or adjust organisational structure providing clear roles and responsibilities
9) To generate and maintain a supportive, safe, inspiring and constructively	a) The GCRO has a work environment that is attractive to exceptionally talented, committed	i) Develop a GCRO Charter which outlines how GCRO staff conduct themselves

challenging work environment	and innovative professionals	
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The GCRO has, over the past year, made strides in redesigning its structure, clarifying roles and responsibilities, promoting discussion on organisational culture, and developing a ‘Charter of Collegiality’.

Rearrangement of management structures and responsibilities

At its inception, the GCRO established the post of ‘Research Director’ to oversee the heartland work of the GCRO. However, with the growth in the size and complexity of GCRO operations, the multiplication of responsibilities at all levels of complexity can no longer be fulfilled by a single individual, and a more rational distribution of responsibilities must be engineered. Going into the future, the Research Director will accordingly be relieved of the many pipeline oversight, production management and quality assurance functions that had increasingly limited the capacity of the incumbent to give high-level strategic direction to the research enterprise of the GCRO.

At top management level, the post of Research Director has been modified to ‘Director of Research Strategy’ to indicate the re-orientation of this role away from, in particular, oversight over GCRO production processes and editing/quality-control of outputs. Processes and systems have already been put in place to manage these crucial aspects of the GCRO’s work much more systematically and, over time, we will institutionalise the role of taking final responsibility for output quality at different levels of the organisation. The role of the Director of Research Strategy will then be redirected to the following key considerations:

- Ongoing refinement and steering of the overall research strategy of the GCRO;
- More systematically supporting the growing research leadership roles and capabilities of senior staff in relation to defined research themes;
- Advising on the conceptualisation of and approaches to research projects, and their alignment with the GCRO’s overall research strategy;
- Overseeing and building more sustained and structured engagements with government partners, especially local government (rather than managing ad hoc day-to-day responsiveness to requests);
- Systematically building a practice of knowledge co-production across the academic–policy interface, for example by overseeing how research projects can be constituted in reciprocal engagement with policy partners, and by defining opportunities for synthesising academic insights from policy-facing work;
- Building innovations in partnered approaches into wider research teams and consortia;
- Supporting the Executive Director in building the international profile of the GCRO in key domains; and
- Continuing to serve on the Management Committee (ManComm – the peak management structure of the GCRO) as before, as well as on the two new structures outlined below.

Two new structures will take on the oversight of the GCRO’s research work, namely the Research Steering Committee and the Research Oversight Committee.

- The **Research Steering Committee (ReSC)** will provide ongoing oversight and leadership for the individual research programmes that constitute the GCRO’s research agenda. Each programme of research may conceivably be allocated to a senior-level staff member (a ‘lead’), or a collaborative working group, but the ReSC will serve as a collective and supportive platform for appraising and advising on the progress of all research programmes. All senior and principal researchers will serve on the ReSC, as will other functional leads (such as GIS, dissemination, etc.) and the top management of the GCRO.
- The **Research Oversight Committee (ROC)** will provide detailed oversight and advice on individual research projects throughout their trajectories – inception, budgeting, work-in-progress, peer review, quality assurance and production management. Although individual research programme leads may, over time, take on growing responsibility for ensuring the projects within (or associated with) their programmes are ready for oversight, the work of the ROC will nevertheless provide top-level consideration and important milestones in the project timeline, and advice and support for both project leads and research programme leads when these positions get allocated.

Clarification of senior-level research responsibilities

The period of strategic review sharpened our approach to achieving a balance between the demands we make on senior-level researchers and the levels of support and career development that the organisation provides. In recent years, we have provided structured opportunities for researchers to undertake doctoral studies, and we have introduced a policy and process to afford promotions through the GCRO’s ranks. Colleagues have themselves initiated supportive and productive writing support programmes. We have been particularly gratified by the leadership and innovation shown by several researchers, and we are anticipating growing and extending this ownership and strategic direction into the priority thematically focused research programmes noted above. The ReSC is intended to provide a strengthened and more collective approach to advancing our research agenda and to supporting our senior layer in their responsibilities.

As the organisation has grown, and as new talent has entered the GCRO, so has the need for more structured forms of mentoring and support, as well as the need for senior researchers to take greater responsibility for research leadership and quality assurance. We have clarified our production pipelines and associated work practices, and we will be providing judicious opportunities for strengthening research and leadership skills at individual and collective levels. Although we emphasise the necessary ‘self-regulating’ character of researchers, this should be accompanied by appropriate levels of supportive career development. The next year or two will see the new structures and patterns of work bedding down into familiar routines, suited to the size and purpose of the organisation.

This Strategy Framework proposes that each of the research programmes will, over time, be led more actively and deliberately, with roles and responsibilities for research leadership – vested at the level of senior and principal researchers – clarified and institutionalised. This research leadership will entail, amongst other things, maintaining coherence, providing intellectual guidance, and taking care of the progress of projects and the quality of outputs in each.

Restatement of organisational culture

The reflective processes of 2019 included some consideration of how we are positioned in a society in which fierce debates are underway about racial, gender and national identities, as well as deep concerns about abuse and other violent pathologies. We recognise that our organisation is embedded in society and not immune from these currents, and that an explicit set of shared understandings and stances on these matters helps to preserve an environment of collegial trust and safety. Similarly, there are a few assumptions about appropriate modes of professional etiquette and conduct between ourselves as researchers that underpin the frank and respectful relationships at the heart of a critical and reflective research organisation. These deliberations have resulted in an explicit set of values and commitments captured in a draft 'Charter of Collegiality'. The preamble to the Charter begins as follows:

The GCRO is a unique work environment that values each individual staff member. The GCRO culture and programmes support staff to pursue excellence in their research and personal career goals (e.g. PhD leave and writing retreats). All GCRO staff are expected to lead on their work and engage with all colleagues in a professional and mutually supportive manner. Despite this positive, affirming and mature work environment, it is possible that friction and misunderstandings may occur. It is equally the case that there may be staff who engage in misconduct of one kind or another. This Charter is a first step towards addressing these instances and ensuring that the GCRO continues to be a supportive, safe and inspiring workplace, and constitutes a set of constructive commitments and guidelines for working together.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

GCRO monitoring and evaluation of organisational outcome indicators, as well as indicators for planned actions, will be managed through the following structures and processes:

- **GCRO Management Committee:** ensuring that all high-level goals are actioned in approved annual plans and budgets; providing high-level performance oversight; providing individual staff performance oversight and support; initiating further strategic planning.
- **GCRO Research Steering Committee:** providing research leadership to GCRO research programmes; developing the GCRO annual work plan; monitoring the production pipeline throughputs and processes; assessing the state of dispersed research administration tasks; assessing and strategising around academic production, strategic positioning, dissemination and impact; and collectively overseeing career pathing and development, and the mentorship of junior researchers.
- **GCRO Research Oversight Committee:** approving new project concepts and steering the process of project budgeting and planning; quarterly reflection on progress and spending on all projects; troubleshooting; collectively determining next steps for a near-final output; facilitating external reviews; greenlighting for production; final sign-off for dissemination of completed designed publications.
- **Individual staff workplans and performance reviews:** performance against identified actions can be reduced to specific targets for GCRO staff in periodic work planning and performance review sessions.
- **GCRO annual planning and budgeting and concomitant annual performance reporting:** 'performance' for outcome indicators cannot be reduced to numeric targets, rather, contributions to targeted trends will be considered annually and over a five-year period.
- **Regular reportage and accountability to the GCRO Board,** the governing structure of the GCRO, which convenes three or four times annually.
- **Continued recording and documentation of GCRO outputs and associated citations:** including enumerating all outputs; recording readership and use of GCRO websites and email service; recording the use of Quality of Life Survey data; documenting citations of academic and GCRO outputs; and recording engagements with and requests from government partners.