Strategic Plan: December 2008 – March 2009

Submitted to the GCRO Board

Summary

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) has been launched and is now operational. This strategic plan covers the final third of 2008/09 (December 2008 to March 2009), and explains briefly the workload of the GCRO in that time, as well as how the budgeted funds will be spent. (Given the short time period and emphasis on building the institution, this is perhaps more a Business Plan than a Strategic Plan.)

In brief, the December to March period is unavoidably dominated by the need to build the institution internally – hiring staff, purchasing hard- and software for the data management environment, and so on – as well as externally, through partnerships with key institutions, building relationships within the GCR as well as amongst knowledge institutions within the GCR (and beyond, such as the Cape Urban Observatory and mooted eThekwini City Observatory). Strategically, there is a need to equip the Observatory with the hard- and software – including significant data platform, applications, servers and architecture – play the role envisaged for it. The same applies to the staff we need to identify and secure in this period. to And there is a heavy emphasis on planning – using a participatory process to put in place consensus-based indicators the GCRO will use to benchmark the GCR, measure performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, and provide feedback to GPG and other stakeholders.

As such, the core theme of the strategic plan is 'building', and is organised under the following headers:
- Building the GCRO
- Building relationships
- Building partnerships
- Building an indicator set
- Building the data infrastructure
- Planning outputs and events (these will occur beyond the time period covered here)

Introduction

1. The Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) was publicly launched on 11 September 2008. A partnership between the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG), University of Johannesburg (UJ) and University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits), GCRO is tasked with benchmarking the Gauteng City-Region (GCR) globally, as well as proactively sourcing intellectual capital from the academy to help GPG identify and/or resolve key policy problems, either actual or predicted.

2. A generous grant from GPG ensured that the GCRO has an attractive set of offices in University Corner, on the Wits campus. Consultants had previously suggested indicator sets for measuring and benchmarking the GCR, while similar recent work has been commissioned by the Gauteng Economic Development Agency (GEDA). In sum: GCRO needs to hit the ground running, and ensure that it is able to play its allotted role as soon as possible. It needs to provide a locus for much of the disparate city-region activity currently underway.

3. Although launched in September, the Executive Director (ED) only began work on 1st December 2008, while the Indicator Director chose not to take up the position offered to him. As such, the GCRO office currently (and for the foreseeable short-term future) comprises an Executive Director, and there is real urgency around the need to secure both administrative staff to keep the office running as well as senior research capacity to participate in indicator design and refinement, stakeholder liaison, commissioning research to fill identified knowledge gaps, and provide policy support to GPG as required. This is even more true of the senior database manager.

4. Unfortunately, the long summer break will slow this down – job adverts for example will only be placed in January – but by the end of this quarter the GCRO should be largely staffed (i.e. core staff in place), known, with partners and a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) in place, and ready to make the 2009/2010 a critical and successful year of delivery. At the same time, the GCRO will take utilise the 2008/2009 budget to put in place the hardware, applications, servers and software[1] (including ArcGis) that will be needed to host, analyse, map and manage the datasets that will be the lifeblood of the Observatory.

5. This will entail building relationships and partnerships, so that all GCR stakeholders see value in working with GCRO (which means GCRO has to identify where we can add value to their work); developing a consensus-based set of indicators, so that all agree these are appropriate benchmarks and will take seriously the analysis of data measuring those indicators; and identifying both 'quick-win' and more long-term problem solving issues, to seek to add value to the work of GPG by leveraging the intellectual capital primarily from UJ and Wits, but broadening this over time to include the many knowledge-based institutions in the GCR.

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[1] Wherever possible, GCRO will seek to use open source software.

Theme 1: Building GCRO

6.   The period under discussion is one where some very basic administration is required to get GCRO functional, including ensuring connectivity, telephone and fax lines, postal addresses and the like.

Staffing

7.   The key activity under this header is the need to advertise and secure the services of staff for GCRO. At an administrative level, this is fairly straightforward: GCRO needs a receptionist-cum-administrator, someone who can manage reception as well as manage petty cash, start a small resource centre, and so on. We also need a senior administrative officer to run the GCRO, manage the finances, ensure a clear fit between GCRO and the Wits financial system and rules, prepare finances for audit, and so on. The initial administrative staffing is thus one junior level (receptionist) and one senior level (senior administrative officer) appointment.

8.   Staffing at research level is less clear. The initial design was for an Executive Director, with an Indicator Director as (essentially) second-in-charge, with responsibility for indicators and data managing. However, given that the incumbent ED has many of the requisite skills that the Indicator Director would have had, it is more likely that GCRO will seek to appoint 2-3 senior researchers to form a team working with the ED, and alongside a senior data manager. A proposal will be made to the Board in this regard.

9.   The latter will be responsible for accessing data (i.e. proactively seeking it), cleaning, integrating different datasets, GIS mapping, running the statistical package (probably SPSS) and providing data solutions in consultations with Wits CNS. If s/he has analytic skills as well, that will be a bonus; at this stage, we are seeking someone who can find, clean, merge, run and map data; ensure its integrity; and ensure it remains clean over time as new data layers are identified, accessed and added. The research team – the ED plus an economist and 1-2 urbanists – will be responsible for analysis, reporting, and all associated research tasks. The approach is to be small and high-level. Sector-specific skills may be needed – and would be separately funded – if GCRO is asked to take on sector-specific projects. For example, Enerkey has raised the possibility of our hosting their decision support system (a databased planning solution), which would require an energy-cum-urban specialist.

Web

10.   Ultimately, GCRO hopes to offer as much of its data and analysis as possible via an interactive website. Citizens should be able to generate maps and data about their suburb or ward, using our site. This sounds easy but is a complex and expensive task; we will initiate meetings with web designers in this phase, and begin the web construction work during 2009, so that when the first 'State of the GCR' report is issued in late 2009, the site is ready and able to offer the data and mapping, not merely the report.

Legal status

11.   The other key activity is to move swiftly to finalise the legal form of GCRO. Currently, GCRO is a free-floating entity located at Wits, with the ED a Wits employee. It was agreed by Board (and the ED has been instructed to move on this as a priority) that

GCRO is better constituted as a Section 21 not for profit entity, in which all 3 partners will have an equal stake, and where all academic credits can equally be shared across the 2 university partners. Meetings between the ED and the legal advisors of the partners begin in December, and continue in 2009.

12. This is important to resolve as swiftly as possible, since it has very obvious implications for future staff – will they be Wits employees, or GCRO employees? Will senior staff be put off by the fact that GCRO will only be able to offer contract posts and no long-term security, which universities can offer? And if research staff are GCRO employees, how do we ensure that they can benefit from some of the critical in-kind resource mobilisation of the university, most obvious access to e-journals, libraries and so on? These issues all need to be resolved within the parameters of the existing rules and regulations of the host institution.

Fellowships

13. GCRO would like to offer Fellowships, for senior professionals from government, local and overseas academic institutions and so on, to come and spend time at GCRO, find time for critical reflection, writing and sharing, and so on. Initial consultations will take place in this period with donors around the possibility of supporting this initiative.

The office

14. Finally, the GCRO office needs to be fully equipped. This includes purchasing a photocopier, a large volume printer, and all the usual needs – stationery, business cards and letterheads, and so on. Additional security is also needed, for the protection of both equipment and staff – including a CCTV link to the security guards on the ground floor.

Actions

15. Key actions are summarised below:
    o Draft job descriptions
    o Draft adverts and liaise with Wits re placing them (January)
    o Short-list and interview
    o Hire staff: senior administrative officer; receptionist; senior data manager; senior researchers
    o Ensure full **connectivity** for GCRO office (MWEB hosting GCRO domain e-mail and website, Wits phone lines, etc.)
    o Pay off leased **computers** in advance and realise cost saving
    o Additional **computer** (with some data power) purchased
    o Fully equip GCRO office (dustbins, boardroom chairs, etc.)
    o Install additional **security** (CCTV)
    o **Equipment** purchased (photocopier, bulk printer, etc.)
    o Meet with GPG/UJ/Wits legal teams re Section 21 status and move forward ASAP
    o Meet donors re possibility of funding GCRO Fellowships
    o Meetings with web designers

Building relationships

16. GCRO has been put in place to advance our knowledge and understanding of city-regions; but also to serve the needs and improve performance of government (different spheres and potentially multiple provinces, as the GCR borders drift into Free State, Mpumalanga and North West). GCRO will rely on being able to access – i.e. to take over and analyse – existing datasets, and offer value add to those who provide the data. GCRO wants to be the preferred choice research manager and partner for any entity interested in the GCR and urbanisation more generally, and all of this relies on building strong relationships with key partners. (This is broader than the later section that deals with building formal partnerships.)

17. The first couple of months of 2009 will be spent organising a series of meetings with key municipal officials (GIS mappers, researchers, data managers, and senior managers) to explain what GCRO is, identify their needs and see if and how we can help meet those needs. This will include 'quick wins' – for example, possibly co-ordinating the OECD Territorial Review, if this goes ahead; or hosting the Enerkey decision support system and so on – as well as more long-term needs and knowledge gaps.

18. We will also be gathering together existing indicator sets, as well as data sets (see below). (The basic thrust is to 'sell' the idea of GCRO as an agency that can add value to their work by providing high-level critical analysis; the danger we need to avoid is being asked to do basic tasks such as clean data sets or do other basic work that people prefer not to do themselves.) Once we know who is measuring what, with which indicators and what dataset, GCRO will be able to avoid duplicating existing work and find a way to take it forward and add value. Once we know who is doing what, we can (a) negotiate access to the datasets and add as data layers for our GIS mapper; and (b) better refine the GCR-wide indicators that lie at the heart of GCRO's work.

19. The relationships are not restricted to the GCR. For example, the ED has already attended the launch of the Cape Urban Observatory, and we have tentatively agreed to offer seats on each others' research structures (the RAC in our case). As the eThekwini Urban Observatory comes into being, the same will occur. Continental and international relationships will also need to be nurtured and built.

Actions

20. Key actions are summarised below:
    o Meet all key government players in the GCR
    o Meet key academic partners within Wits and UJ, and then extend beyond to other knowledge-based institutions, universities, technikons, and so on in the GCR
    o Do the same outside GCR
    o Meet with representatives of civil society including labour, private sector and NGOs (via SANGOCO)
    o Meet key GCR players (e.g. meeting with GEDA already arranged; meeting with CUO; etc.)
    o Gather existing indicators
    o Get input on future/additional indicator needs
    o Get input on additional research needs (filling knowledge gaps)
    o Gather/identify existing data and assess quality

- o Identify quick wins (e.g. international comparative benchmarking of GEDA-type agencies)
- o Put together a set of indicators with data; and indicators where the data are corrupt or unclean; and/or where indicators do not exist but are needed; followed by gap analysis to help ensure GCR indicators (a) don't duplicate but (b) do add value.

Building indicators

21.   A core task for 2009 is to build a set of **GCR-wide indicators**. The process will be iterative at one level, where we gather all existing indicators, and see which are best suited to GCR-wide analysis; and then explore the availability and quality of data for measuring those indicators. This is true of municipal/metro/province-wide indicators, as well as the national development indicators used by the Presidency; those used by other institutions (CSIR, DBSA, etc.), public entities and projects (Enerkey, climate change strategy team, etc.) and of course those commissioned from consultants for the GCR (the CUBES report, the recent report commissioned by GEDA, etc.). Indicators need to tell us where we want to go and so also have to reflect work that is happening on the ground whether it has existing indicators or not. A lot of this work has been done by CUBES, the GDED and others.

22.   For indicators to work, they need to be well designed; but more than that, they need to be consensus-based. In other words, a developmental process is needed to devise and refine the indicators, so that all spheres of government, partners and stakeholders feel that they *own* the indicators, and will in turn take seriously analysis of those indicators once the data have been gathered. This is why relationship-building is so critical to the work of GCRO.

23.   This first year is critical in the life of GCRO, since it is baseline year – all subsequent analysis will compare with 2009 data (other than where we can access GCR-wide quality data that matches or approximates our indicators and has earlier inception dates). This means (a) setting aside more budget than in a 'normal' year for extensive data collection; and (b) getting the indicators right! In pursuance of the latter, we want a participative process that includes the following steps and actions:

- o Meet and develop relationships
- o Gather existing indicators, scrutinise for GCR-relevance (all spheres, all partners)
- o Gather existing datasets, check for integrity and quality
- o Gather existing GCR-wide indicators
- o Develop meta-set of indicators
- o Host indicator workshop – key partners – to develop draft set of GCR indicators
- o Host larger GCR-wide workshop to finalise GCR indicators
- o Take to Board for sign-off
- o Initiate data gathering immediately (this will comprise gathering or purchasing existing data and commissioning a large baseline data gathering exercise where data are not available) (this may not occur within the time period being discussed here)

Build data infrastructure

24. At the heart of GCRO is a large number-crunching engine, that is fed data around the agreed indicators, and provides useful analytic outputs for uptake – GIS maps, statistical datasets, and the like. It is impossible at this point to specify exactly what we will need: but we can say with certainty that we will need very large processing power, capacity for receiving data, capacity for cleaning and integrating data; software to map the data; perform multivariate statistical analysis of the data; and research capacity to turn all of this into useful and meaningful outputs.

25. We believe that open source software should be used wherever possible, a point where we and the Cape Urban Observatory are in agreement, which will allow us to try and ensure compatibility across our two institutions from the data architecture onwards.

26. We will also have to find ways around the multiple rules and regulations governing who can access data, what can be made publicly available and what cannot, and so on. We will look to the Board to support us in opening doors regarding data access, but hope that where institutions see that we can add value to their data, they will be more willing to share it. (We are some way behind the Cape, for example, where the Premier's Office has initiated a process of gathering together all provincial GIS data sets and integrating them into one clean meta-set.) In some cases, unfortunately, we will have to buy it.

27. We saw earlier that GCRO will undertake a detailed set of consultations to identify datasets, as well as data gaps; assess the cleanliness and integrity of data; and seek to access (i.e. load and use) the data wherever possible, through the indicator-related consultation process. From this we hope to begin building the data layers for the data processor, and for the GIS mapping application. At the same time we will have to identify the frequency and regularity with which data are updated by different entities; and in what form we can access the data (e.g. if it is sent electronically, we will need far more bandwidth than if we fetch the data on CD or other transportation format).

28. At the heart of the exercise will be a powerful – and expensive – machine, housed in CNS in a secure location (i.e. not part of the general server since the data will require protection from access), accessible to GCRO only, for cleaning, integrating and running the numbers. Our current sense is that SPSS remains the most advanced and user-friendly statistical package; but that we will look carefully at open source (e.g. Ubuntu) options. We will also need ArcGis for mapping. As a result, this theme has among the fewest activities, but has a larger budget than most other themes.

Tasks

- Identify data sources
- Negotiate access (by any means necessary…)
- Assess, clean, run or discard
- Identify data gaps (for commissioned research to fill)
- Assess software options
- Assess application options
- Assess server options
- Purchase all above

- o De-bug and begin loading existing datasets as they become available, as well as publicly available datasets
- o Prepare specs for meta-set (level of data integrity) – liaise SANBI, SAEON
- o Ensure (as far as possible) compatibility with CUO

Build partnerships

29. We noted earlier that a broad relationship-building exercise is needed; it will run parallel to an exercise in building partnerships with key institutions. GCRO is itself a partnership, and that ethos needs to be reflected in how we work and who we work with.

30. A key vehicle for developing partnerships will be the Research Advisory Committee, for which a proposal will be submitted to the Board in January (as agreed). The RAC will probably end up with a core set of members who attend very regularly, and an outer layer who attend less frequently, and/or others who are invited to meetings where their particular expertise can add value.

31. We also hope to build institutional partnerships, cemented via the RAC, with the CUO (discussed above), and the knowledge institutions that litter the GCR – universities, knowledge councils, research institutions (Water Research Commission, Agricultural Research Commission, etc), research NGOs and of course other universities in the GCR.

32. The point here is to see how we can leverage their expertise to improve our own work, particularly with regard to problem solving and policy development for GPG.

33. We also need to structure relationships with key institutional players in the environment, such as **dplg**, the Presidency (particularly the spatial mapping unit), SA Cities Network and others. The same is true beyond our borders, with bodies such as Habitat, Metropolis and others.

34. Most obviously, we need to formalise relationships with a few key observatories that seem most appropriate for comparative purposes, and begin working together in joint projects. (Some we proposed by the CUBES paper commissioned by the Premier's Office, others by the papers commissioned by the Gauteng Economic Development Department, and GCRO needs now to play a central role in this process.)

Tasks

- o Meet key partners
- o Identify individuals to serve on RAC
- o Develop RAC proposal for Board, including public process
- o Advertise as appropriate
- o Establish relationship with observatories in 2-3 countries abroad
- o Discuss with SACN the possibility of GCRO involvement in city report writing in SADC countries

Outputs, events, publications

35. This aspect of GCRO's work will primarily fall after the end-March cut-off date, but the bullets are intended to illustrate the way we see this occurring over time (more detail will be provided in the January strategic plan for 2009/2010).

    o Expert workshop to refine indicators
    o Provincial workshop to finalise GCR indicators
    o Annual 'State of the Gauteng City-Region' report
    o Annual workshop to launch report, discuss findings, amend as required
    o *Ad hoc* reports in response to specific requests, problem solving, quick wins, etc.
    o Participation in local and international conferences
    o Journal articles
    o 2009 will be our baseline year, and we need to carry forward as much as possible from 2008/2009 to add to 2009/2010 and give us a major resource for gathering GCR-wide primary data specifically tailored to meet the indicators developed for the GCR.