May 2026

Statement of Principles: Research for Sustainable Communities

Preamble[1,2]

Given the rise of the climate emergency, growing inequalities, and rapid urbanization, research is needed to support the transformation of cities and communities worldwide into sustainable, accessible and livable places, including rural and peri-urban areas, informal and other diverse settlements. As publicly funded organizations, Global Research Council (GRC) participants recognize their responsibility to foster positive societal impacts from their investments. Research can support the identification and understanding of challenges, as well as novel implementation approaches that advance broad societal needs at the local, regional, and global level. This includes advancing healthy and resilient environments, where social and community risk factors are addressed to promote the well-being of all.

GRC participants are reimagining what research for sustainable communities and cities means. It represents a shift from research *on* communities to research *with* communities, grounded in opportunities for all and resilience. Such research is no longer judged only by what it produces, but by the transformations it contributes to people's lives and local systems, while recognizing that meaningful change is incremental and unfolds over extended time horizons.

Through this joint vision for sustainable communities, the GRC can build on already established broad and universal principles to support localized but scalable solutions. Building upon the 2024 GRC Statement of Principles on Sustainable Research, and in alignment with the 2026 GRC Statement of Principles on Open Science, participants in the 2026 Annual Meeting of the GRC recognize the following principles as fundamental to publicly-funded research for sustainable communities:

Principles

Research *by* and *with* communities

GRC participants can help drive efforts that integrate local knowledge systems – including Indigenous knowledge systems – as active partners in the co-design of research agendas and priorities, wherever appropriate. Research for sustainable communities seeks to address multiple

[1] The Global Research Council is a voluntary, participant-based organization that recognizes the different missions, mandates and remits of its participant organizations within their respective national research eco-systems. Its positions, decisions or statements are non-binding on participant organizations. Endorsement of such reflects that participant organizations may adopt statements in ways that are consistent with national policies and priorities.

[2] While the U.S. National Science Foundation remains committed to the GRC as an organization dedicated to collaboration and cooperation among research funding agencies, NSF is not in a position to endorse the 2026 Statements of Principles and Call to Action, as their content is not consistent with agency and U.S. administration priorities.

challenges by co-creating, testing, evaluating, and scaling solutions that support effective and scalable implementation. It integrates diverse knowledge domains (legal, financial, participatory, technical, social and health) to enable successful transformation projects.

Research for sustainable communities aims to improve the quality of life for all members of the community and overcome barriers while safeguarding community identity, cultural heritage, and ways of life, ensuring that transformation strengthens local values that advance access and opportunity for all, and resilience. Training to build researchers' capacity to conduct research with communities is also important.

GRC participating organizations recognize the importance of funding Citizen Participation in Science programs. They also recognize the importance of funding policy research, which investigates who drives change (including policymakers, urban planners, community leaders, and private sector actors), and who is included or excluded from shaping decisions and outcomes.

Success means societal and environmental benefits

GRC participants agree to responsibly reconsider assessment and evaluation systems that currently prioritize short-term outcomes and individual academic careers over long-term societal benefit. In accordance with the GRC Dimensions of Responsible Research Assessment, and instead of measuring research success mostly in terms of publications, data, or global visibility, the impact of research for sustainability is best assessed by whether communities are more resilient, involved, empowered, and able to shape their own futures because of the research.

Social benefit goes hand-in-hand with environmental benefit; research organizations should strive to preserve and protect natural environments by supporting long-term environmental stewardship in their operations and research activities. A healthy environment is an essential precondition for community wellbeing.

Socially and environmentally beneficial use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in research

The development and application of AI and digital tools in research have the opportunity to revolutionize the way people work and live. To ensure that societies gain from these opportunities, it is crucial that data and models used by AI are available to researchers, innovators and communities in a way that is transparent, secure, and trustworthy.

AI can support development that benefits communities and increase digital and AI literacy by improving access to knowledge, services, and decision-making tools. important to advance opportunities for all, transparency, sustainability, and to ensure benefits are distributed across communities.

AI enabled research can also increase impact through supporting multilingualism in research, a key factor for meaningful community participation. It is also crucial that data and models used by AI are accessible and avoid biases, including algorithmic bias, as addressed in the 2025 GRC Statement of Principles on Research Management in the Era of Artificial Intelligence.

Responsibly and sustainably designed AI can support development that benefits all communities and help narrow digital divides between communities by improving access to knowledge, services, and decision-making tools. AI-enabled research can increase impact when it is evidence-based, transparent, and accountable, and contributes to capacity-building.

Open Science supports research for sustainable communities

Achieving sustainable development requires early and continuous relationship-building, open science and data sharing commitments, and integrated policy and financing frameworks that empower local communities. Both Research for Sustainable Communities and Open Science make clear that for science to address complex global challenges, changes are needed in terms of how the research is governed, valued, and communicated.

Community Awareness and Research Literacy

Effective research for sustainable communities actively supports awareness and understanding among community members of how research can be used as a practical tool to address locally defined challenges.

Building such awareness requires participatory two-way communication, trust-building, and iterative engagement that demystifies research processes and connects directly to community priorities, lived experiences, and decision-making needs.

Access to Research Enablers and Support Systems

Effective community-led and community-engaged research depends on fair access and opportunities to all enabling institutions and resources. Examining and overcoming systemic inequities and constraints expands access, participation, and opportunities for all in research aimed at transforming cities and communities worldwide.

GRC participants recognize the critical role of local and regional universities, research institutes, public agencies, and funding bodies in supporting communities to develop research skills, design relevant projects, and access appropriate funding mechanisms.

These actors function as long-term partners and facilitators, helping bridge gaps between communities, knowledge systems, and policy or funding environments.

Context-sensitive funding and institutional capacity

Research for sustainable communities operates within diverse governance, economic, and institutional contexts. Differences in regional research infrastructure, municipal capacity, and access to long-term financing shape what is feasible and should be considered in funding design to expand opportunity and impact. Public research funders should adopt flexible and context-sensitive funding approaches that account for differing capacities and community realities, including longer time horizons, adaptive grant mechanisms, and targeted support for local and regional institutions. The GRC can promote shared learning and collaboration, to address challenges by expanding access and opportunities.