Executive Summary

This report summarizes the key aspirational ideas that were distilled from a three-month effort to engage the George Washington University (GW) research community in a discussion on how to advance the university on the path to research preeminence. Our committee (Appendix A) had an intentionally aspirational focus which was distinct from and complementary to the research infrastructure focus of the Faculty Senate Research Committee.

Starting with a brief assessment of where GW now stands (ranked #70 by US News and World Report and #80 in federal research expenditures) and a virtual SWOT analysis, the report outlines key principles, goals and recommended initiatives. Our committee solicited input through public town halls, an online portal, outreach to key faculty stakeholders, student surveys and from committee members who represented each of the 10 schools within the university (Appendix B).

Five principles were identified that lay the foundation for high impact research: preeminence, identity, ecosystem, leadership and diversity. These principles provide context for three aspirational goals of investing in people, ideas and infrastructure with specific initiatives outlined under each goal. Each initiative includes a time frame and priority level, specific action steps, metrics to measure progress and a categorization of required resources.

The major strength of this process was the large number of high-quality ideas solicited from multiple sources through complementary data collection techniques. The major limitation was the compressed timeline which did not allow for gathering information on best practices from aspirational research universities or a more thorough consideration and prioritization of these initiatives. Accordingly, one of our major recommendations is that our committee should represent the first step to a faculty academic research leadership team that we believe will be a critical component of the successful implementation of the university research strategic plan.

There is an urgent aspect to the recommendations in this report. Competing universities are making significant inroads into the DC market, diluting the value of a key university strength. At the same time, GW’s ranking has declined from #51 in 2013 to #70 in 2020. The research infrastructure is the subject of widespread concern and GW faculty view its repair as essential so that the strategic recommendations of this report can be implemented. GW must act rapidly and decisively to address these issues to capitalize on whatever competitive edge we now hold in the local research marketplace. There should be a preeminent research university in the nation’s capital, and it should be GW, but our place in that role is not guaranteed.

Providing that the research ecosystem issues are satisfactorily addressed, the university can advance on the path to preeminence as a comprehensive research institution. However, strategic focus and leadership, institutional cultural change, and a major investment of new resources are required to achieve this goal. The research aspirations of the university need to be scaled to the resources that are available to implement the recommendations of this report.
High Impact Research Definition and Metrics

Based on the input we received, the committee defined high impact research as research or scholarship which has a significant impact upon an academic discipline and/or upon society. HIR can be conducted by individual investigators or by intradisciplinary or interdisciplinary teams.

There is a great breadth of research being conducted across the university and academic disciplines have numerous and varying metrics for monitoring HIR that need to be respected. These included grants, contracts, research expenditures, books, peer-reviewed publications, citations, invited presentations, licensing revenue, job creation, patents, start-ups, commercialization outcomes, customers, businesses formed, societal and community impact, improvement in education, non-profit formation, public policy change, working papers, social media presence, clinical practice change, improvement in population health, reduced costs, museum sustainability and art exhibitions. As GW advances on the path to research preeminence, we strongly recommend that the university adopt a framework that goes beyond traditional counts to a broader, more comprehensive approach to assessing research impact. Both the National Science Foundation and Hewlett Foundation have recently developed frameworks to assess cross-disciplinary, high-impact research. The supplementary materials provided as a companion to this report provide one approach from Adams et al. (Adams, McVeigh, Pendlebury, Szomszor. 2019. “Profiles, not metrics.” Web of Science, Clarivate Analytics.) that describes how an impact profile, as opposed to finite metrics, can provide a richer description of high impact research in a multi-disciplinary environment.

SWOT Analysis

To describe the current strategic state of GW as a HIR institution, a high-level analysis of current research-related strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) was conducted. The summary SWOT below provides an overview of selected environmental factors.

HIR Internal Strengths: Location. GW enjoys both proximity and connectivity to numerous international, federal, regional, and local institutions that serve as research sponsors, partners and recipients. Research-oriented faculty. GW has a strong base of faculty conducting basic and applied research across a range of disciplines forming the foundation for transdisciplinary research that addresses large-scale societal challenges. Committed leaders. Led by the Board of Trustees and President LeBlanc, university leaders are committed to supporting the growth of comprehensive high impact research at GW. Core facilities. Facilities such as SEH, SPH, Corcoran School of Art, and high-impact research centers and institutes across GW provide a foundation upon which to build preeminent research.

HIR Internal Weaknesses: Research ecosystem. The current research ecosystem (including processes, facilities, and HR) needs to be improved to support GW’s high impact research aspirations. Culture and climate. Faculty members lack confidence in the university’s capacity to address the research infrastructure challenges. Siloed faculty. Faculty across the university have limited opportunities to meet and collaborate. GW hospital and medical school. GW hospital does not provide the clinical revenue that is needed to invest in research and the clinical research infrastructure could be improved. Weak connection between development and research. Unlike some peer institutions and major competitors, GW has received no $100M-$1B institution-transformative gifts to date, connections to corporate and private donors are limited and researchers are not widely supported by development activities. Load, salary and resource imbalance. Teaching loads and administrative (including committee) work reduces available research time. Compensation to retain top researchers and internal funding
for research in the humanities and social sciences need to be evaluated. **Student engagement and support.** Graduate student fellowship packages across GW are not consistently competitive and undergraduates need to be systematically engaged in HIR.

**HIR External Opportunities: Demand for data science expertise.** The broad demand for data science expertise provides a unique opportunity for a comprehensive institution like GW to link data science to HIR in disciplines such as neuroscience, cybersecurity, the social sciences and cross-disciplinary research with STEM disciplines. It also provides an opportunity for GW to lead in developing data driven assessment procedures for HIR. **Global collaboration.** Opportunities for developing international research collaborations continue to grow as global institutions seek US-based partnerships. **Proximity to government/policy: Location in the national capital facilitates collaboration with policy and prestigious research centers located in DC. Regional technology environment.** Opportunities exist to leverage the vibrant regional tech environment (e.g. with Amazon HQ2), collaborate with companies launched through the GW New Venture Competition; and expanded innovation lab activities to encompass humanities and social science disciplines. **Contract work.** Research contracts with private industry, NGOs, federal agencies and state governments.

**HIR External Threats: Encroaching institutions.** The locational strength GW maintains is quickly being eroded by non-DC based institutions moving into the region and establishing impactful local partnerships (e.g. Johns Hopkins purchasing Sibley, Suburban and the Newseum, Virginia Tech constructing a $1B campus adjacent to Amazon HQ2 and establishing an Innovation Center with Children’s National on the Walter Reed campus, etc.). **Competitive market.** The region is increasingly competitive for top technical talent and these individuals are lured away from the university for more attractive salary and benefit packages. **Reputation.** GW is not widely viewed as a scientific or clinical research institution, nor is it optimally engaged with the surrounding community. **Cost of living.** Regional growth means the cost of living will continue to rise; making recruitment and retention challenging for all levels of research faculty, staff and students.

**Charge to the Committee**

The charge of the High Impact Research (HIR) Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was to “Develop a strategy for improving research productivity across the university that addresses all disciplines and exploits the unique opportunities available at GW.”

**Current State**

**National Rankings.** U.S. News and World Report ranked GW #70 among U.S. universities in 2020, a decline from #51 as recently as 2013 (https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities). GW has a strong base of successful schools and departments on which to build. Three GW Schools rank in the top 25 when compared with their peers: International Affairs (#8 per Foreign Policy), Public Health (#12) and Law (#22), with other Schools and Programs ranked between #40 and #75: Political Science (#40), Nursing Masters (#43), History (#59), Medical Research (#60), Business (#61), Education (#61), Economics (#63), English (#67), Medical Primary Care (#67) and Engineering (#75).

**Research Indicators.** Data from OVPR demonstrates that GW had $156M in federal research expenditures in 2018 (#80 in NSF HERD rankings, Association of American Universities (AAU) median $352M); 11 National Academy members in 2016 (AAU median 35); 8 major faculty awards in 2016 between #40 and #75: Political Science (#40), Nursing Masters (#43), History (#59), Medical Research (#60), Business (#61), Education (#61), Economics (#63), English (#67), Medical Primary Care (#67) and Engineering (#75).
$9.0M and $37.8M); 255 doctorate recipients in 2018 (AAU median 413); and 74 post-doctoral fellows in 2018 (AAU median 167).

**Principles**

Five principles were identified as being fundamental to the advancement of the university in high impact research: preeminence, identity, ecosystem, leadership and diversity.

**GW is positioned for preeminence.** GW is well-positioned to advance on a path towards preeminence as a comprehensive and high impact research university. However, strategic focus and leadership, institutional cultural change and a major investment of new resources will be needed to achieve this goal. The research aspirations of the university need to be scaled to the resources that are available to implement the recommendations of this report.

**GW’s unique identity should be clearly defined and leveraged across all disciplines.** One of the most critical competitive advantages that GW has is its strategic location in downtown Washington, DC, with faculty and students alike drawn to working, studying and living in the political and policy hub of the United States. Yet, the value of this identity is not sufficiently or strategically leveraged to advance high impact research. The further development of STEM-based disciplines will require considerable investments in new faculty and research facilities yet also creates an opportunity for GW to leverage its traditional strengths in the humanities, social sciences, policy and law to develop unique interdisciplinary collaborations with STEM-based fields.

**A strengthened research ecosystem is a foundational pillar of research excellence.** The current status of the research infrastructure at GW continues to be of significant concern across the university. There is broad consensus that the university must address the comprehensive recommendations of the 40-member Faculty Senate Research Committee (pre-and post-award management, research integrity and compliance, high performance computing, resource allocation, shared facilities) so that GW can aspire to research preeminence.

**The implementation of the strategic research plan should be guided by a team of high impact academic researchers.** A permanent faculty-driven architecture is needed to provide comprehensive and strategic research leadership within the university. A team of academic researchers who are compensated, have some degree of decision-making authority and report directly to university leadership would complement and reinforce the largely operational research leadership provided by OVPR.

**Diversity, in all its forms, drives high impact research.** Research preeminence can only be achieved by a faculty that is truly diverse in its demographics and in its thinking. Demographic diversity invites a broader circle of faculty, staff and students who can contribute to preeminence. Intellectual diversity is critical to creating a comprehensive research university that prioritizes interdisciplinary research.

**Proposed Goals, Initiatives and Metrics**

The path to preeminence in HIR requires investments in people, ideas and infrastructure. This section presents the recommended initiatives and action steps needed to achieve the goals.

**Goal #1 – Invest in People: Leadership, Faculty, Students and Staff**

*GW will invest in identifying, supporting, retaining, developing and recruiting a cadre of high impact researchers who will provide scholarly leadership across the university.*

1a. **Establish an Academic Research Leadership Team (ARLT) to help guide the implementation of the HIR strategic plan.** *(Short-term High Priority)*

- Establish an ARLT comprised of GW HIR faculty leaders from across the university to focus on the implementation of the HIR strategic plan and the growth of GW as a research
institution. The ARLT would complement the operational efforts of OVPR and the Faculty Senate Research Committee to address the research ecosystem challenges that have been identified.

- Incentivize the leading HIR faculty at GW to join the ARLT by compensating them for their participation and granting them some degree of decision-making authority.
- Work with the GW administration to determine the optimal structural home for the ARLT, most likely reporting to a full-time VPR or the Provost.
- Launch a data gathering process to include: site visits to peer institutions, conducting exit interviews with departing HIR faculty, identifying strategic research priorities and establishing a process for adjusting these priorities as internal and external conditions evolve.

**Metrics:** Establishment of the ARLT. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

1b. Develop initiatives to improve faculty scholarship broadly across the university that are implemented at the school level but are promoted, supported and monitored centrally. *(Medium-term High Priority)*

- Prioritize the strategic recruitment and retention of faculty from diverse demographic backgrounds so that GW becomes recognized as a destination institution for underrepresented minority scholars.
- Develop a program for strategic course relief for selected faculty with exceptional promise for HIR coupled with increased hiring of additional or teaching faculty to backfill educational responsibilities.
- Create a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) required for all newly recruited tenure track faculty in annual cohorts, train them in GW research procedures and study team management, and foster connectivity across the university to stimulate interdisciplinary research.
- Support professional development accounts (PDAs) of $3-5K annually for faculty in under-funded disciplines to support conference attendance, travel, publications and research assistants.

**Metrics:** Successful diversity strategy, FLC, course relief program and PDAs. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

1c. Identify, retain, support, develop and recruit High Impact Research Faculty who help drive preeminence and contribute disproportionately to national and international reputation and rankings. *(Short- to Medium-term Very High Priority)*

- Work with the Deans to rapidly identify all GW faculty who are clearly and currently doing HIR.
- Develop individualized plans for HIR faculty with their Deans and Chairs to enable them to focus on research and assess what it would take to retain them.
- Offer HIR faculty three-year renewable appointments in the GW Research Academy (see below).
- Work with schools to recruit HIR faculty, as individuals and cluster hires, in strategic focus areas.
- Recruit world-class medical faculty with expertise in clinical trials.

**Metrics:** Implementation of approaches that value HIR faculty. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

1d. Launch a student research initiative that increases undergraduate and graduate student support and builds the expectation that faculty members will engage student researchers. *(Medium-term High Priority)*

- Evaluate graduate student packages across GW and benchmark against peer institutions.
• Establish systematic processes for incorporating and funding undergraduate students in research programs.
• Identify senior leadership to drive this initiative and ensure that faculty are incentivized for mentorship.
• Develop an online portal to link students to research opportunities and funding support.
• Increase university participation in national programs such as NSF’s Research Experiences for Undergraduates and the Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

Metrics: Substantial increase in faculty who engage students in research. Resource requirements: Moderate

1e. Assess the compensation structure for HIR research staff that results in their successful recruitment and retention in a highly competitive job market. (Medium-term Moderate to High Priority)
• Competitively compensate top-notch grants managers and research staff who support HIR portfolios.
• Review research staff HR classifications and compensation structure.
• Become a market leader in research staff financial and career development.
• Increase investment in post-doctoral researchers (both in numbers and in packages).

Metrics: Increase in recruitment and retention rates of HIR staff. Resource requirements: Moderate

Goal #2 – Invest in Ideas: Research Culture, Academy, Centers and Institutes and DC Partnerships

GW will develop, promulgate and communicate a HIR culture that positions the development and diffusion of knowledge as a public good and as a core function of a comprehensive research university.

2a. Reframe the GW culture around HIR through strategic messaging that emphasizes scholarship as a top priority that is woven throughout the fabric of the university. (Short-term Very High Priority)
• Launch an initiative that promotes the central role of high impact research at GW.
• Recruit Deans and Chairs who conduct HIR so that research is prioritized by leadership throughout GW.
• Recruit faculty with intellectually diverse expertise whose primary academic priority is scholarship.
• Consult with the Faculty Senate about modifying the GW APT guidelines to include HIR as part of tenure review, post tenure review for continued HIR and codifying the added value of interdisciplinary research.
• Develop a communications plan that highlights HIR internally at GW and externally through proactive media and social media outreach and assists researchers with communicating their research to maximize impact.
• Implement a searchable list of faculty publications to support collaboration and promote scholarly success.

Metrics: Measures to reframe the culture of research at GW. Resource requirements: Limited to Moderate

2b. Create the GW Research Academy (GWRA) to stimulate intra- and interdisciplinary research, effectively creating a permanent academic think tank on campus. (Medium-term High Priority)
• Offer three-year renewable terms in the Academy that provide partial salary support and/or teaching relief to faculty doing high impact research from across the university.
• Develop Academy activities to include interdisciplinary workshops, distinguished speaker series, idea incubators to generate innovative research ideas and NSF-style “sandpit” retreats.
• Create a developmental component of the Academy to provide mentorship and pilot funding to the most promising junior tenure track faculty across the university.

**Metrics:** Creation of the Research Academy. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

2c. Establish Institutes and Centers that promote inter-disciplinary research in strategic focus areas. (Medium-term Moderate to High Priority)
• Conduct an analysis of existing Institutes and Centers, maintaining those who are actively contributing to scholarly preeminence and providing fiscal support to enhance the productivity of those doing HIR.
• Develop several large new Institutes and Centers from among those recommended by the faculty and listed below. The selection of these is beyond the purview of this report, but the following priorities emerged during the strategic planning process.
  ⇒ Data Analytics Institute: Various permutations included Data Science, Data Ecology, Big Data, Cybersecurity, Digital Research, Bioinformatics, Digital Humanities, Data Visualization, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Social Aspects of Technology and Public Interest Technology
  ⇒ Policy-related Centers: Science Policy Research Institute, Center for Law & Policy, DC version of Chicago Urban Labs and Center for Policy and Social Analysis
  ⇒ Clinical Research Center to link the SMHS, MFA and the hospital
  ⇒ Interdisciplinary Research Institutes for Neuroscience, Sustainability and Climate Change, Humanities, Health Disparities and Determinants of Health, XD@GW Cooperative
• Monitor evolving federal research priorities and support research cross-university initiatives in these areas. Current NIH priorities include Alzheimer’s disease, opioid use and influenza, current DOD priorities include cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.
• Establish a task force to determine the feasibility of conducting classified research at GW through benchmarking of peer institutions, determining requirements and conducting a cost/benefit analysis

**Metrics:** Support for existing preeminent Institutes and Centers, selection and development of new Institutes and Centers. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

2d. Develop an extensive network of research partnerships that embrace our DC location and that are rooted in faculty interests. (Medium-Term Moderate to High Priority)
• Catalogue and support existing research partnerships with DC institutions, maintaining those which are actively contributing to scholarly preeminence and providing fiscal support to those who do HIR.
• Create an expectation that all GW academic departments and institutes will develop and maintain at least one new research partnership with DC and regional institutions – examples include the Smithsonian, Kennedy Center, foreign embassies, DC government agencies, federal agencies such as NIH, NSF, NIST, DOD, EPA, FDA, NASA, DOE, GSA, Homeland Security, State Department, World Bank, IMF, PAHO, CNN, NPR, Washington Post, Amazon, biotech, think tanks, etc. etc.
• Establish a research consortium with other DC academic institutions based on the DC CFAR model and the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative in Virginia.
• Cultivate large donors who can provide transformational gifts to enable HIR partnerships

**Metrics:** Increase in network of DC and regional partnerships. **Resource requirements:** Limited to Moderate
Goal #3 – Invest in Infrastructure: Faculty Research Center, Laboratory, Computational and Clinical Facilities, Subsidized Housing and the Virginia Campus

GW will build new bricks and mortar facilities to support HIR. As demonstrated by the SEH and the SPH, the impact of new buildings can be catalytic and drive the recruitment and retention of HIR scholars. Facilities selection is beyond the purview of this report, but the following strategic priorities have emerged.

3a. Build a centrally-located, stand-alone GW Faculty Research Center (FRC) to serve as the central gathering place (currently non-existent) for faculty from across the university. (Medium-term Very High Priority)

- Design the FRC to include modern conference rooms, dining facilities, and idea incubator space which would stimulate interdisciplinary, collaborative research by enabling scholars from across the university to congregate, exchange ideas, host potential HIR recruits, and generate research-related programming.
- Establish a scholarly agenda for the FRC to be set by the Academic Research Leadership Team and members of the GW Research Academy, for whom the FRC would serve as their academic home

**Metrics:** Building of the FRC. **Resource requirements:** Moderate to Robust

3b. Ensure that existing facilities are up to appropriate standards and ensure that preventative maintenance and emergency plans are in place. (Short-term High Priority)

- Maintain GW facilities that support research and researchers. These facilities are critical to recruit and retain top faculty staff and students.

**Metrics:** Review research-related issues for all facilities. **Resource requirements:** Limited to Moderate

3c. Build a second laboratory building to align research facilities with the emphasis on HIR and STEM at GW. (Medium-term Very High Priority)

- The SEH has limited capacity for growth and thus the construction of a second lab building seems inevitable.
- Engage faculty in the design of “SEH2” to maximize square footage for laboratory space.
- The path to preeminence will necessitate the recruitment of world-class scientific faculty and research-oriented students who will need additional laboratory space.

**Metrics:** Decision to build SEH2. **Resource requirements:** Robust

3d. Develop a world-class computational facility. (Medium-term Very High Priority)

- Support a new Data Analytics Institute. This recommendation emerged as one of the most frequent priorities cited by faculty members during this process.
- Ensure that robust IT support is available for faculty to maximize the use of computing resources.

**Metrics:** Decisions made about facilities needed for this new Institute. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

3e. Build world-class medical and clinical research facilities to enable GW to advance on the path to preeminence as a comprehensive research university. (Medium-term Very High Priority)

- Assess the strategic and fiscal costs of renovating vs. replacing Ross Hall, which has had mechanical challenges, power outages and leaks.
- Construct a new building for the clinical research facility that the medical school faculty indicate is needed.
• Clarify the fiscal arrangement with the hospital and the university’s options for additional clinical revenue.

**Metrics:** Strategic decision about the future of Ross Hall. **Resource requirements:** Robust

3f. **Develop affordable housing options to support recruitment of post-doctoral and doctoral students.** (Medium term Moderate Priority)

- Develop on- and off-campus housing options for post-doctoral and doctoral students, as this is an impediment to recruitment of these essential research cadres to Washington, DC.
- Assess standard housing options for post-doctoral and doctoral students at research institutions in other cities with a high cost of living (e.g. Columbia and NYU in NYC).
- Work with Chief People Officer and Provost to develop and implement strategies to provide more competitive packages to support research preeminence.

**Metrics:** Analysis of benefits and risks of providing affordable housing. **Resource requirements:** Moderate

3g. **Strategically leverage the Virginia Science & Technology Campus (VSTC).** (Long-term Moderate Priority)

- Evaluate whether a portion of VSTC could be leveraged as an investment property as was done with Square 54. Given the population, technology-based and commercial growth of Loudoun County, and the extension of Metro near to campus, VSTC provides a significant revenue opportunity for GW.
- Use VSTC resources generated to reinvest into supporting people, ideas and infrastructure for HIR.

**Metrics:** Analysis of the optimal use of the VSTC. **Resource requirements:** Limited
Appendix A

High-Impact Research
Strategic Planning Committee Members

Chair
Alan Greenberg
Professor and Chair of Epidemiology
Milken Institute School of Public Health

Vice Chair
Diana Burley
Professor of Human and Organizational Learning
Graduate School of Education and Human Development

Faculty
Tyler Anbinder
Professor of History
Columbian College of Arts & Sciences

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Assistant Professor of Microbiology, Immunology, and Tropical Medicine
GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Tom Colby
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GW Law

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Jeanne Geiger-Brown
Professor of Nursing and Associate Dean for Research
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Deans

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Pamela Jeffries  
Dean, School of Nursing

Geneva Henry  
Dean, GW Libraries and Academic Innovation

Office of the Vice President for Research

Robert Miller  
Vice President for Research

Gina Lohr  
Senior Associate Vice Provost for Research

CIBAS Support

Don Reagan  
Manager
Leslie Roe
Associate
Appendix B

Summary of Process

Meetings
Monthly Committee Meetings - Oct 1, Nov 4 and Dec 6 from 12-2
Town Hall Meetings - Oct 10, Nov 14 and Dec 17 from 12-2
Faculty Senate Research Committee – Nov 4 and Dec 6
Medical School Faculty – Dec 11

Solicitation of Input
Multi-pronged approach through Town Halls for the GW community, faculty input through committee member school representatives, strategic meetings and emails, student surveys, an online portal and from the committee members themselves

Timeline and Framing Questions
October – High Impact Research (HIR)
1. What does high-impact research mean in your discipline?
2. What metrics are used to assess research success in your discipline?
3. What impediments do you encounter when conducting your research at GW?
4. What university resources or commitments would facilitate the conduct of your research?

November – Strategic Analysis
1. Propose 1-3 innovative, large-scale "big ideas" to increase high impact research and improve research productivity across the university.
2. List 1-3 strategic focus areas for high impact research that GW should develop.
3. How can GW stimulate and facilitate interdisciplinary "team" research?
4. What new facilities might be needed to enhance the research enterprise and how might these promote high impact interdisciplinary research?
5. How can GW further engage with the surrounding community - e.g. federal government, industry, technology sector, etc.?
6. How can GW promote research on data analytics?

December – Data Synthesis and Report Writing and Vetting

January – Interim report due Jan 24