



COLLABORATION

Reflections on Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Lessons from US-Mexico Border Philanthropy



Life on the US-Mexico border demands collaboration. In this region, where virtually every element of community, economy and environment are inextricably tied to the 'other' side, philanthropic leadership takes on a different tone and shape. As community leaders, philanthropic institutions are poised to blaze a path of increased understanding and collaboration between communities and our two countries. This snapshot on cross-border collaboration collects and shares the US-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership's reflections on the conditions and considerations community philanthropy organizations should keep in mind when 'crossing' cultural boundaries to collaborate with other organizations, whether these organizations are separated by international borders, cultural, linguistic or organizational differences.

Cultural Humility | Organizations that are entering into cross-cultural collaborative relationships are well served by entering the space with the intention of seeking to understand first before seeking to be understood. Be ready and open to challenging your own assumptions around what it means to work together.

Trust and Relationships | Have historical familial, political and other community relationships been considered when drafting the invitation list to the table? The notion of the 'right people' differs from culture to culture. Sensitivity to these nuances can greatly advance the collaborative effort. Further, consider the present status of trust amongst the partners.

Self-interest can Feed Common Vision | Has the self-interest of the partners been aired in a culturally appropriate manner? Are the right conditions in place for partners to share why they have come to the table and what they are expecting personally and for their organizations from the collaboration? Is a common vision being drafted on the basis of full disclosure of self-interest?

Beware, Language IS Power | Have language barriers been addressed so that participants can equitably communicate? Language – whether we are referring to English versus Spanish or the jargon that is specific to an organization – has the power to separate and unite. Speak the language the setting calls for. Ask permission to speak a language that is not native to the setting. Provide translation where necessary and possible. Check acronyms and sector specific language at the door.

Leading and Sustaining | If the collaboration is tied to the personalities or types of leadership at the top, have the partners considered how to infuse the organization at all levels with the value and standard of cross-cultural collaboration? Are there mechanisms at the board and staff level that enable the organization to carry the collaboration forward beyond individual leadership?

Steps to Strengthening the Organizational Capacity of Cross-Cultural Collaboration | In the discovery stage partners analyze the existing conditions. The design stage includes planning and implementation of collaborative action. Incubation is a stage where new ideas and approaches – the result of cross-cultural innovation - are piloted. The growth stage provides an evaluative space so that activities can be expanded and evolve as needed. Finally, the integration stage is the institutionalization of activities and provides ongoing support for the cross-cultural collaborative structures that have been built.

Get Involved!

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*A young girl attends a school
in Tijuana that supports
students with special needs.
The school is a grantee of
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Ambos Nogales:

The Case of Santa Cruz Community Foundation & Fundación del Empresariado Sonorense A.C.

Santa Cruz Community Foundation serves the Nogales, Arizona region. Across the border is the Nogales, Sonora chapter of the statewide Fundación del Empresariado Sonorense A.C. (FESAC), a foundation supported by Sonora's business and industry leaders.

For years, these sister city foundations have worked closely together on many aspects of their work as community philanthropy organizations, such as:

- Joint strategic planning and regional priority setting.
- Joint programming and grantmaking including a Nonprofit Economic Viability Summit attended by nonprofits from both sides and a Binational Executive Roundtable for nonprofits leaders from Ambos Nogales.
- Joint donor development and services that has revealed to donors a wider array of causes and organizations to support in the region and increased giving.
- Co-production of *Crossings*, a short documentary film examining the immigrant experience. The film serves as a valuable donor development resource.
- Co-hosted fundraising activities such the annual *Folklorico* event.
- Consultation and shared decision making on the recruitment and hiring of foundation staff.

Cross-Border Giving:

The Case of the Fundación Internacional de la Comunidad and International Community Foundation

In the San Diego/Tijuana border region, two sister community foundations, the International Community Foundation and Fundación Internacional de la Comunidad have together invested resources in deepening a greater regional understanding of the ties that bind San Diego and Tijuana.

Their most recent collaborative work includes:

- Research and advocacy around the facilitation of in-kind cross-border giving and, ultimately, the publication of *A Guide to Cross-Border In-Kind Gifts to Mexico*.
- Research and publications on common regional health priorities and impacts of poor health in the binational region. This includes the co-production of the documentary short, *Fragile Lives: Blurring Lines: Addressing the Critical Health Challenges in the San Diego-Baja California Border Region*. The documentary short was selected as a Silver Award recipient for the 2008 Wilmer Shields Rich Award for Excellence in Communications in the category of Public Information Campaigns by the Council on Foundations.
- Research and publications on the current status and needs of the nonprofit sector that serves the Baja California region.
- Ongoing common board and advisory committee service and consistent communication and interaction between staff.



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