

PHILANTHROPY IN THE BORDER REGION

Analysis to inform funders, policymakers, and stakeholders on the factors that impact philanthropy along the Border, and what it will take to strengthen collaboration and leadership to help communities thrives.

US•MEXICO
BORDER PHILANTHROPY PARTNERSHIP
ALIANZA FRONTERIZA DE FILANTROPÍA
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The U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership serves as the leading binational organization focused on building prosperity along the U.S.-Mexico Border region through leadership, collaboration, and philanthropy.

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U.S.-MEXICO BORDER PHILANTHROPY PARTNERSHIP



SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

We believe that the challenges and opportunities across the Border region demand informed civic participation, strong leadership and cross-border understanding, and collaboration.

For generations, the Border region between Mexico and the United States has been transformed from a lightly populated geographic area to a dynamic enterprise zone with a booming economy and population. Today, substantial numbers of residents on both sides of the Border interact on a daily basis, producing a society and geographic territory that is different from the rest of the United States and Mexico.

However, the Border contrasts a highly-developed, wealthy nation with a developing country and the issues are well known but persistent. Research indicates that if the region comprising the Border across the 10 states – Mexican and American –were America's 51st state, it would rank at or near the bottom in nearly all measures of prosperity, community health, educational opportunity, and quality of life. Further, negative stereotypes about the Border region are widely held throughout the United States and Mexico, and they frustrate possible solutions for many Border issues and justify imposition of federal and state Border policies and programs, often without adequate input from local stakeholders and often accompanied by unintended consequences.

This Border Brief, which is one in a series, highlights issues and offers critical insight to drive new solutions. It is our desire that this information will help foster greater philanthropic and corporate support, as well as our nonprofit partners to carry them out to address the need for coordinated philanthropic leadership, cross-cultural understanding, and public policy advocacy. The Border Briefs provide current and accurate information about health, environment, education, migration, philanthropy, and general Border dynamics.

SECTION TWO

HISTORY OF BORDER PHILANTHROPY

The importance of philanthropy in the Border region cannot be overstated. It serves as a bridge between communities, often filling gaps that business and government services do not. This Border Brief aims to explore the rich history of philanthropy along the U.S.-Mexico Border, examining its evolution, impact, and the unique challenges it faces. By analyzing notable laws, key events, and influential organizations, we will trace the development of charitable giving in this region from its early roots to its current state. Through this information, we seek to demonstrate that philanthropy along the U.S.-Mexico Border is not only a response to regional challenges but also a powerful catalyst for positive change, fostering collaboration, innovation, and resilience in communities on both sides of the international line.

Pre-20th Center Charitable Giving

Philanthropy along the U.S.-Mexico Border has deep historical roots that predate the establishment of the current international boundary. In pre-colonial times, indigenous communities in the region practiced various forms of mutual aid and communal support. With the arrival of Spanish colonizers, the Catholic Church became a significant driver of charitable activities, establishing missions that provided education, healthcare, and social services to local populations.

During the 19th century, as the Border region underwent significant political and demographic changes, informal networks of support continued to play a crucial role. Family networks, religious organizations, and community groups often stepped in to provide assistance during times of hardship, natural disasters, or conflict.

Emergence of Formal Philanthropy Organizations

The early 20th century saw the gradual formalization of philanthropic efforts in the Border region. This period was marked by significant demographic shifts, including increased migration and urbanization, which brought new challenges and opportunities for charitable work.

In the United States, the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) spurred the creation of many charitable organizations, some of which extended their work to the Border region. For example, the YMCA established branches in Border cities, offering educational and recreational programs. Similarly, the American Red Cross became active in disaster relief and health initiatives on both sides of the Border. In Mexico, the post-revolutionary period saw the emergence of new civil society organizations. The Mexican Red Cross (Cruz Roja Mexicana), founded in 1910, began to play a significant role in providing emergency services in Border communities.

However, the oldest nonprofit organization in Mexico is the Hospital de Jesús in Mexico City, founded by Hernán Cortés in 1534. The hospital was originally created to provide care for the indigenous population and the poor, marking a significant contribution to public health and social welfare in the region.

Expanding Cross-Border Philanthropy

The latter half of the 20th century marked a significant shift towards more organized, cross-border philanthropic efforts, which were spurred on largely economic booms, demographic changes, and shared challenges such as the environment.

For example, the increasing economic ties between the U.S. and Mexico culminated in 1994 with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which spurred cross-border commerce and heightened awareness of shared challenges and opportunities. The rapid growth of border cities like San Diego–Tijuana and El Paso–Ciudad Juárez, along with other key urban pairs—Calexico–Mexicali, Nogales–Nogales, Douglas–Agua Prieta, Naco–Naco, Columbus–Puerto Palomas, Presidio–Ojinaga, Del Rio–Ciudad Acuña, Eagle Pass–Piedras Negras, Laredo–Nuevo Laredo, McAllen–Reynosa, Rio Grande City–Camargo, Roma–Miguel Alemán, and Brownsville–Matamoros—underscored the complex and dynamic relationships that define the border region. These sister cities, spread across four U.S. and six Mexican states, serve as vital gateways for trade, labor, culture, and family ties, making clear the importance of coordinated approaches to infrastructure, environmental management, migration, and social policy.



As more commerce, people, and information flowed between each side of the Border, the shared challenges moved to the forefront of conversation. In response to these developments, new models of philanthropy emerged. Community foundations began to focus specifically on cross-border issues.The San Diego Foundation originally established the International Community Foundation as a philanthropic fund to support charitable giving across the U.S.-Mexico border and in Latin America. Over time, the fund grew in scope and impact, eventually becoming an independent foundation dedicated to empowering cross-border philanthropy and community development throughout the region. The U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership (BPP) developed a new approach to collaborative giving that brought together funders and nonprofits from both countries. Today, we have seen further expansion and professionalization of philanthropic efforts in the region. Technology has enabled new forms of giving, while increased scrutiny of cross-Border financial flows has led to more sophisticated legal and operational frameworks for international philanthropy.

Throughout this evolution, philanthropy along the U.S.-Mexico Border has increasingly been recognized not just as a means of addressing immediate needs but as a tool for fostering long-term development, binational cooperation, and cultural understanding in this unique and complex region.

Remittances

An important factor that influences the dynamics of philanthropy and the exchange of money between Mexico and the U.S. is the flow of remittances - funds sent by workers in the U.S. to their families and communities in Mexico.

Remittances play a significant role in the Mexican economy, with an estimated $63.3 billion in remittances received in 2023, equivalent to approximately 4% of the country's GDP. This influx of funds from the U.S. to Mexico provides a crucial source of income and support for many Mexican households, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas. Notably, 96% of the remittances originated from the United States, particularly from states like California and Texas.

Research has shown that a portion of these remittances are also channeled towards philanthropic and community development initiatives in Mexico. Individuals often send money back to their hometowns to support local schools, infrastructure projects, religious institutions, and other community-based efforts. This form of "collective remittances" represents an important bridge between the diaspora community in the U.S. and the nonprofit sector in Mexico. Philanthropic organizations on both sides of the Border have sought to leverage this flow of remittances to drive greater social impact.

SECTION THREE

SIZE OF THE SECTOR

In the United States, the nonprofit sector is vast and diverse, comprising over 1.5 million registered nonprofit organizations as of 2020. These organizations span a wide range of focus areas, including education, healthcare, human services, arts and culture, and environmental conservation, among others. In the United States, the nonprofit sector generated over $1.4 trillion in economic activity in 2023, accounting for approximately 5.2% of the national gross domestic product (GDP). This underscores the sector's significant role in the U.S. economy.

In contrast, Mexico's nonprofit sector is smaller, with approximately 40,000 to 45,000 registered CSOs as of 2022. This figure includes tax-exempt CSOs and organizations registered with the Federal Registry, which assigns the Clave Única de Inscripción (CLUNI) necessary for organizations to receive government funding. While Mexican CSOs cover a broad spectrum of activities, the sector is disproportionately focused on service delivery, with fewer organizations engaged in advocacy, community development, or policy-oriented work. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), in 2022, activities in the sector of civil organizations and other nonprofit institutions contributed approximately 2.9% of Mexico's GDP or 416.06 billion Mexican pesos (roughly $20.7 billion USD). This figure is made possible through annual measurements by INEGI via the Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions, which helps us understand the weight of the third sector at a national level.. This marks a significant increase from earlier estimates and highlights the growing economic importance of the nonprofit sector in Mexico.

Charitable giving and donations play a crucial role in sustaining the nonprofit sectors in both countries. In the United States, individual and corporate donations totaled $484 billion in 2021, with the majority (69%) coming from individual donors. This philanthropic giving equates to around 2.7% of disposable personal income in the U.S.

In Mexico, the level of charitable giving is lower, with local donors traditionally focusing giving efforts on religious organizations and established foundations, rather than local or grassroots entities. Corporate philanthropy has also been relatively limited in Mexico compared to the U.S., though some large companies have started to play a more active role in supporting nonprofit initiatives.

The nonprofit sectors in Mexico and the United States exhibit significant differences in terms of size, scope, charitable giving, volunteerism, and grantmaking. These disparities reflect the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts that have shaped the development of civil society in each country. While the U.S. nonprofit sector is larger, more diverse, and benefits from higher levels of charitable giving and volunteerism, the Mexican nonprofit sector faces greater challenges in terms of resource mobilization and institutional capacity. Addressing these gaps will be crucial for strengthening the role of civil society organizations in driving social, economic, and environmental progress along the Border.

Studies indicate that 82% of Mexicans prefer to help the needy directly rather than through charitable organizations. In contrast, 55% of Americans gave to charities in 2023, contributing a total of $557.16 billion to various causes. Individual donations accounted for 67% of this total, with significant contributions directed toward religious institutions, education, human services, and health sectors.

In Mexico, both individuals and corporations can deduct charitable donations from their taxable income. The maximum deductible amount is 7% of the taxable income from the previous fiscal year. Only donations to authorized donee organizations are eligible for this deduction. In the United States, individuals who itemize their deductions can generally deduct charitable contributions up to 50% of their adjusted gross income (AGI). However, this limit can vary depending on the type of donation and the recipient organization. Corporations in the U.S. are allowed to deduct charitable contributions up to 10% of their taxable income, with any excess contributions carried forward for up to five years.



SECTION FOUR

UNIVERSITIES

Universities situated along the U.S.-Mexico border occupy a critical position in advancing binational philanthropy. These institutions promote cross-border collaboration, generate research grounded in local contexts, and support community engagement initiatives that respond to shared regional challenges. Serving as both intellectual and civic anchors, they inform philanthropic efforts through evidence-based strategies that reflect the lived experiences of border communities.

Universities like the University of San Diego (USD) are actively engaging in cross-border collaboration, with their School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES) and Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies playing a central role in initiatives that connect both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. One of the key programs is the Border Fellows program, an effort of the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, which brings together graduate students from various disciplines to explore and address issues unique to the border region. This initiative fosters cross-border learning and leadership by providing students with hands-on experiences and opportunities to work on projects that directly impact the communities on both sides of the border.

In addition, the University of California, San Diego's Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies stands as a leading academic hub for public policy research and dialogue on U.S.-Mexico relations, particularly in the areas of governance, migration, and binational cooperation.

Several universities in Arizona are also contributing to cross-border collaboration, particularly in the fields of public health and community service. Northern Arizona University (NAU) supports cross-border initiatives through various community engagement and research programs, aimed at strengthening ties between Arizona and Mexico. Arizona State University (ASU) takes a similar approach, offering programs that foster international collaboration and innovation, with a strong emphasis on addressing the challenges faced by border communities. The University of Arizona (UA), for instance, supports the Ventanilla de Salud program, a binational health initiative that provides health services to underserved communities along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) plays a central role in cross-border collaboration, particularly through its focus on binational research, community

engagement, and educational opportunities. As a key institution located on the U.S.-Mexico Border, UTEP is committed to addressing the unique challenges of the region. Through programs such as the Institute for Policy and Economic Development (IPED), UTEP fosters cross-border collaboration in areas like public policy, economic development, and environmental sustainability. UTEP's Center for Border Economic Studies also focuses on economic development strategies that support cross-border trade and regional growth. Through its Center for Inter-American and Border Studies, UTEP further enhances cross-border knowledge exchange and institutional partnerships.

Texas A&M International University's Office of Global Initiatives, operating through the Binational Center, runs several key programs, such as the Program for International Nonprofit Excellence, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations in the region, coordinating activities for local nonprofits, including organizations from Nuevo Laredo, to exchange ideas and design joint projects for collaboration and community development across Borders.

On the Mexican side, universities in the northern Border states play an equally vital role. The Colegio de la Frontera Norte, headquartered in Tijuana and with campuses throughout the northern region, is a premier research institution focused on migration, labor markets, public policy, and sustainable development.

CETYS University in Baja California is deeply invested in developing leadership for the Border region and partners with a host of cross-border partners including the University of San Diego SOLES program. Its leadership programs emphasize skills that are critical for fostering binational collaboration, such as negotiation, cultural competency, and strategic thinking. The Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC) supports binational education through its international scholarship programs, offering financial assistance to students pursuing studies across the U.S.-Mexico Border. This initiative enhances UABC's capacity to contribute to regional cooperation by ensuring access to higher education for students from both sides of the Border. Also, UABC undertakes applied research and community-based projects that support philanthropic efforts in domains such as public health, educational access, and urban inclusion.

The Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) is an important institution for binational collaboration, with a strong emphasis on research, leadership development, and community engagement in the Border region. UACJ works closely with partners in the U.S. to strengthen educational and professional ties, offering various programs designed to enhance cross-border collaboration in fields like engineering, health, and social sciences. Through initiatives such as the Binational Research Program, UACJ brings together faculty and students from both sides of the Border to tackle regional challenges and share knowledge. UACJ's role in fostering cooperation and innovation between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso is critical to the ongoing success of binational efforts aimed at addressing issues such as economic disparity, migration, and access to education and healthcare.

Both the University of Monterrey (UDEM) and Tecnológico de Monterrey are at the forefront of philanthropy and binational collaboration. These universities engage in impactful community outreach programs, including efforts to improve education, public health, and social justice in the Border region.

The Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila (UAdeC) actively engages in international collaborations through its International Relations Office and by participating in the U.S.-Mexico Border 2025 Program, coordinated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. This program funds environmental projects aimed at improving air and water quality, promoting sustainable materials management, and enhancing joint preparedness for environmental emergencies in Border regions.

The Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas (UAT) has been instrumental in fostering cross-border collaborations to address complex Border issues through partnerships with Texas A&M and South Texas College and hosting the Annual International Conference on Border Studies alongside the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, held in both Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and Edinburg, Texas. These institutions not only collaborate with nonprofit organizations, philanthropic foundations, and governmental agencies, but also serve as conveners for binational dialogue, innovation, and civic participation. Their leadership ensures that philanthropic strategies in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands are not only empirically informed and culturally responsive, but also deeply aligned with the expertise and lived realities of the communities they serve.

920... and growing

There are more than 900 community foundations in the U.S. and over 20 in Mexico, with numbers growing each year.

SECTION FIVE

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

In the United States, private and community foundations play an outsized role in funding the nonprofit sector, providing over $103.53 billion in grants in 2023, accounting for approximately 19% of total charitable giving in the United States. (https://www.jgacounsel.com/blog/givingusa-2024-results/) These foundations, along with government funding and earned revenue, help to sustain the diverse range of nonprofit organizations in the country. Community foundations, in particular, have become critical drivers of change because of their place-based model and their focus on both measuring the need and directing funds to where they can make the most impact. In the U.S., this began with The Cleveland Foundation in 1914 and in Mexico it began with Fundación Comunitaria Oaxaca in 1996. Today, there are more than 900 community foundations in the U.S. and over 20 in Mexico, with both numbers growing each year.

Community foundations are nonprofit philanthropic organizations that serve specific geographic areas, aiming to improve the quality of life for local residents. They pool donations from individuals, families, businesses, and other entities to create endowments, which are then invested to generate income for grantmaking. These grants support a wide range of community needs, including education, health, environment, arts, and social services.



As Dorothy "Dottie" Reynolds, an experienced leader in the field and author of "The Balancing Act: The Roles of a Community Foundation," notes, community foundations perform three essential functions - grantmaker, community leader, and vehicle for local philanthropy. This "balancing act" between these three roles is widespread, regardless of where the community foundation is located. The flexibility of community foundations has been key to their rapid growth. Their ability to accept almost any kind of gift (cash, securities, real estate, mineral rights, even livestock in some parts of the world), satisfy almost any donor interest, provide careful stewardship of funds, and maintain independent governance structures have all contributed to the success of the community foundation movement worldwide.

Beyond grantmaking and serving as vehicles for philanthropy, community foundations increasingly function as community leaders. Their experience working with various donors, nonprofits, and government units gives them unique insights into community issues. Being independent from annual fundraising campaigns allows them to take a long view of community well-being and address challenging issues.

Governed by local boards, community foundations are uniquely positioned to understand and address the specific challenges and opportunities within their communities. They act as conveners, bringing together diverse stakeholders to collaborate on solutions, and serve as catalysts for positive change by promoting civic engagement and leveraging local resources. (Mott Foundation) By fostering a culture of giving and facilitating strategic philanthropy, community foundations play a crucial role in building resilient and vibrant communities, which is why BPP and the impact of philanthropy along the Border has been so successful in the past two decades. Thanks to the help of community foundations in the U.S. and Mexico, BPP has been able to bring together funders and nonprofits to strengthen leadership and impact in the region.

For example, in the U.S., BPP partners with a long list of community foundations who are looking to local leaders at BPP and within its member network to understand the needs of Border communities and offer solutions for new partnership and grant initiatives. In Mexico, the same model has emerged as a key factor in Border growth. As an example, BPP works with Comunalia, the Alliance of Community Foundations of Mexico that comprises 17 community foundations operating across 16 of the country's 32 states. These foundations play a pivotal role in fostering local development by mobilizing resources, building partnerships, and implementing programs that address community-specific challenges. Their work encompasses areas such as education, health, economic development, and environmental sustainability, all aimed at enhancing the quality of life for residents.

By leveraging binational networks, adopting innovative approaches, and addressing systemic issues, community foundations are positioned to play a crucial role in shaping a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future.

The Center for Mexican Philanthropy (CEMEFI), another partner with BPP, has also helped build a robust network of community foundations by providing technical assistance, resources, and guidance. Since its founding in 1988, CEMEFI has been at the forefront of promoting and strengthening the culture of philanthropy across Mexico. Its initiatives, such as advocating for tax incentives for charitable giving and fostering collaboration among nonprofit organizations, have been essential in enhancing the visibility and impact of the philanthropic sector.

As the landscape of philanthropy evolves, the community foundation model is taking hold in Mexico as a viable option for funding. While still developing compared to the U.S., this framework can create consistent and reliable sources of funding for long-term initiatives in the region.

Given the complex, interconnected nature of challenges facing the Border region, there is growing recognition of the need for robust collaboration and coordination among philanthropic organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders. Innovative models of collective giving, pooled funding, and cross-sectoral partnerships are emerging to drive larger-scale, systemic change, with community foundations often at the center of these efforts.

By leveraging binational networks, adopting innovative approaches, addressing systemic issues, fostering cultural exchange, and responding to emerging needs, community foundations are positioned to play a crucial role in shaping a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future for Border communities.

SECTION SIX

VOLUNTEERING ACROSS BORDERS

Volunteering across the U.S.-Mexico Border exemplifies a profound commitment to solidarity and shared humanity. Numerous organizations and individuals actively engage in cross-border initiatives, addressing critical needs in communities on both sides. These efforts not only provide essential services but also build bridges of understanding between people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Some examples include FESAC (Fundación del Empresariado Sonorense A.C.) which partners with the Border Community Alliance to carry out programs that promote civil society, philanthropy, and cultural exchange in the Nogales region. These collaborations strengthen ties between organizations and communities across the Border through shared resources and expertise. In Agua Prieta, Sonora, Rancho Feliz mobilizes approximately 1,000 volunteers annually, primarily from the United States, to participate in programs in Agua Prieta, Sonora, situated directly across the Border from Douglas, Arizona. For over 35 years, the organization has been actively engaged in this community, focusing on initiatives that include building homes, providing scholarships, and offering essential services to residents

Misión de Caridad, operating in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, provides essential services to refugee, migrant, and vulnerable women and children. The organization relies on volunteers who contribute time, skills, and resources to support education and empowerment programs, aiming to break the cycle of poverty in Border communities.

U.S. photojournalist Morgan Smith has dedicated over a decade to documenting conditions at the Border and assisting humanitarian programs. His work includes supporting migrant shelters and Visión en Acción, a sanctuary for individuals with mental illnesses in Ciudad Juárez, raising awareness and fostering cross-border empathy through visual storytelling.

Based in Tijuana, Esperanza International engages volunteers in constructing homes alongside local families. These service experiences not only provide tangible benefits to communities but also foster cross-cultural understanding and lasting relationships between volunteers and residents.

Águilas del Desierto is a volunteer group that searches for missing migrants in the Sonoran Desert, aiming to rescue those in distress and recover the remains of those who have perished, providing closure to families. Border Angels, a San Diego-based nonprofit, conducts humanitarian activities such as desert water drops to prevent migrant deaths, supports migrant shelters in Tijuana, and offers legal assistance to vulnerable children seeking green cards.

Collectively, these and many other organizations and individuals demonstrate the crucial role of cross-border volunteering in addressing humanitarian needs, promoting development, and building bridges between diverse communities. These volunteer efforts complement the work of more formalized philanthropic institutions and illustrate the grassroots commitment to binational cooperation and support that characterizes the Border region at its best.

> *"Volunteerism plays a crucial role in addressing humanitarian needs, promoting development, and building bridges between diverse communities.*

SECTION SEVEN

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal environment surrounding philanthropy in the U.S.-Mexico Border region is complex, involving a web of regulations and agreements that span both countries. Understanding this framework is crucial for philanthropic organizations operating in the Borderlands, as it shapes the parameters within which they must navigate.

In the United States, the legal foundation for charitable giving and nonprofit operations is primarily established by the Internal Revenue Code, particularly Section 501(c)(3), which provides tax-exempt status for qualifying organizations. This status is highly sought after by many nonprofits working in the Border region, as it allows them to receive tax-deductible donations. However, U.S. foundations and nonprofits must also comply with specific regulations when making grants to foreign organizations, such as expenditure responsibility rules and ensuring that funds are used for charitable purposes.

The USA PATRIOT Act, enacted in 2001, has had a significant impact on cross-border philanthropy, increasing scrutiny of international financial transactions. Philanthropic organizations must now conduct thorough due diligence to ensure compliance with key financing regulations. Additionally, individual U.S. states have their own laws governing nonprofits, which can further complicate the operating environment for organizations working across state lines in the Border region.

On the Mexican side, the legal framework for philanthropy has evolved considerably in recent decades. The landmark 2004 Federal Law for the Promotion of Civil Society Organizations formally recognized the role of civil society organizations and established a framework for their operation and government support. The Income Tax Law, through Article 79, defines the types of organizations that can receive tax-deductible donations, with the process for obtaining this "donataria autorizada" status regulated by the Tax Administration Service (SAT).

Beyond the domestic legal frameworks of the two countries, several bilateral agreements have also had implications for charitable giving and nonprofit operations in the Border region. The 1994 U.S.-Mexico Income Tax Convention includes provisions that can facilitate cross-border charitable giving under certain circumstances, potentially allowing U.S. donors to claim tax deductions for donations to some Mexican charities. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its successor, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), while primarily focused on trade, also contain provisions that affect the movement of professionals and volunteers across Borders, which can impact nonprofit programs.

In 2012, the U.S. and Mexico established the Bilateral Framework on Nonprofit Organizations, a non-binding agreement aimed at facilitating information sharing and collaboration between the two countries regarding civil society organizations. Additionally, the Border 2025 Program, a joint effort by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Mexico's Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources, provides a framework for environmental organizations working in the Border region.

This complex legal landscape creates both opportunities and challenges for philanthropic organizations operating in the U.S.-Mexico Border region. While the laws and regulations provide structure and incentives for charitable giving, they also present compliance hurdles and administrative burdens, making organizations like BPP even more vital to the expansion and effectiveness of cross-border philanthropy. Navigating the differing regulations, reporting requirements, and tax implications on both sides of the Border requires constant adaptation from philanthropic leaders.

SECTION EIGHT

SPOTLIGHT: BORDER PHILANTHROPY PARTNERSHIP

Alongside renowned national and international philanthropies, a number of organizations have emerged that are dedicated in large part to the U.S.-Mexico Border region. The U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership (BPP) represents a unique, innovative model, bringing together a network of funders and nonprofit organizations from both sides of the Border to strengthen philanthropy and nonprofit leadership in the region.

In the early 2000s, Susan Berresford, President of the Ford Foundation, visited Nogales, Arizona, where she recognized a unique opportunity to strengthen strategic philanthropy along the U.S.-Mexico Border. This insight led her to bring together a diverse group of partners—community foundation leaders, board members, grantmakers, and program staff from both countries—to form an alliance focused on advancing meaningful community philanthropy in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.

The vehicle for advancing this vision was a dynamic network of community foundations spanning the entire U.S.-Mexico Border region—from San Diego, California and Tijuana, Baja California, to Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Over six years, board members, executive and program staff, donors, and national and regional foundations from both countries came together in a unique, invitation-only funder collaborative. With nearly $40 million invested, the effort focused on strategic philanthropy, capacity building, endowment campaigns, and unprecedented binational cooperation. The initiative resulted in strengthened institutional leadership, collaborative grantmaking, matched endowment gifts, and most importantly, a lasting commitment to cross-border community philanthropy. This initiative was managed in partnership with the Synergos Institute.

By 2008, the initiative had achieved such success that it became clear it needed a permanent, independent structure. That year, Synergos formally transitioned management of the U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership (BPP) to its bi-national governing board to operate as an independent 501(c)(3) in the U.S. and an Asociación Civil in Mexico.

BPP was founded with the generous support of leading national and binational funders, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, The California Endowment, The Ford Foundation (U.S. and Mexico), Fundación Gonzalo Río Arronte, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Houston Endowment, Inter-American Foundation, JP Morgan Chase Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, McCune Charitable Foundation, The Meadows Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and Pfizer Corporation.

During its second phase, BPP partnered with community foundations operating along both sides of the Border. In the United States, these included: Arizona Community Foundation (ACF), Brownsville Community Foundation (BCF), Cochise Community Foundation (an ACF affiliate), Community Foundation for Southern Arizona (CFSA), Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico (CFSNM), Frontera Women's Foundation (FWF), Laredo Area

Border Philanthropy Partnership has **supported 170 initiatives through its fiscal sponsorship program**, channeling more than $17 million USD in cross-border funding.

Community Foundation (LACF), New Mexico Community Foundation (NMCF), San Diego Foundation (SDF), Santa Cruz Community Foundation (a CFSA affiliate), Texas Valley Communities Foundation (TVCF), and Yuma Community Foundation (an ACF affiliate).

In Mexico, BPP's community foundation partners included Fundación Comunitaria de la Frontera Norte (FCFN), Fundación Comunitaria de Matamoros (FCM), Fundación Internacional de la Comunidad (FIC), Fundación del Empresariado Chihuahuense (serving Ciudad Juárez and Ojinaga), and Fundación del Empresariado Sonorense (FESAC) in Nogales.

Since becoming an independent organization, BPP has expanded from a group of community foundations along the U.S.-Mexico Border to a thriving, binational network of more than 420 members. Partners now include academic institutions, corporations, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic foundations—all united by a shared commitment to strengthening the Borderlands through leadership, collaboration, and philanthropy.

Over 40 leaders from both sides of the Border have served on the BPP Board of Directors, with nine individuals assuming the role of Board Chair. Remarkably, much of the original staff remains, and today the team includes seven full-time and two part-time members.

BPP's growth has paralleled periods of profound regional challenge. The organization has weathered escalating violence in northern Mexico (2008–2013), the 2017 Mexico earthquake, the Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy, humanitarian crises caused by migrant caravans (2018–2020), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2024), and an ongoing water and environmental crisis in the region. Throughout these challenges, BPP has remained steadfast in its mission: To support a network of organizations that build prosperity through leadership, collaboration, and philanthropy in the U.S.-Mexico Border region.

In times of crisis, BPP has mobilized swiftly and strategically with targeted interventions:

- Provided training programs focused on violence reduction and humanitarian volunteerism.
- Deployed over $2 million to support migrant shelters in northern Mexico.
- A $2.5 million grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation enabled us to help vaccinate 1 million Mexican nationals in the U.S.
- Delivered more than $650,000 in relief supplies to Baja California, benefiting over 37,000 people.
- Distributed over $500,000 in COVID-19 test kits across the U.S. through the Ventanilla de Salud program.
- Helped our network raise over $150 million to support local COVID-19 response efforts.





To foster cross-border philanthropy beyond crisis response, BPP operates a robust fiscal sponsorship program that enables donors and organizations in the U.S. and Mexico to support charitable initiatives across Borders with transparency, compliance, and efficiency. By offering administrative and legal infrastructure, the organization helps bridge the gap between donors and mission-driven projects, allowing contributions to flow seamlessly across national boundaries.

Collaboration is never easy—but we do it anyway

As of May 2025, the Border Philanthropy Partnership has supported 170 initiatives through its fiscal sponsorship program, channeling more than $17 million USD in cross-border funding. These efforts have enabled a diverse range of community-driven projects across the U.S.-Mexico Border region, strengthening civil society, advancing binational collaboration, and addressing critical local needs through sustained philanthropic engagement.

From the beginning, BPP has modeled the collaborative values it promotes. The organization believes that collaboration must be woven into its DNA. While collaboration is not always easy—requiring humility, empathy, and a willingness to share resources, ideas, and recognition—it is essential to effective cross-border work.

BPP's first major act of collaboration was expanding its network beyond community foundations to include a broad spectrum of mission-aligned organizations. Although some community foundation leaders were initially hesitant, they ultimately embraced this inclusive vision. Today, BPP's extensive network on both sides of the Border is a testament to the value of collaboration.

Eric Pearson, President and CEO of the El Paso Community Foundation, affirms this ethos: "Before starting new initiatives, we reach out to BPP for partners, information, and collaboration."

Over the years, our collaborations have yielded powerful results:

- In 2018, BPP and Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) responded to the humanitarian crisis at the Border by producing a white paper that mobilized over $2 million in funding, including a $100,000 grant from the C.S. Mott Foundation.
- BPP has partnered with the International Community Foundation to support nonprofits in Mexico with training and fiscal sponsorship.
- In 2023, BPP joined the Arizona Community Foundation and Fundación Tichi Muñoz to launch the Arizona-Sonora Co-Investment Initiative, quadrupling funding to Sonora-based nonprofits.
- BPP has collaborated with the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona to support hospice care in San Miguel de Allende and facilitate cross-border training and grantmaking for local nonprofits.
- In partnership with the Paso del Norte Health Foundation, BPP has strengthened the capacity of its family of foundations working on both sides of the Border through targeted organizational development.
- BPP has supported major national foundations—Mellon, MacArthur, Open Society—as they launched new Borderlands grantmaking strategies.
- BPP's work with the San Diego Foundation and International Community Foundation has helped advance the Binational Resiliency Initiative, directing millions to environmental efforts in Baja California.

We've also built alliances with universities, nonprofits, and businesses:

- Indiana University's Fundraising School and Mexico City-based Procura to train nonprofit leaders in Mexico.
- The American Red Cross and BPP have worked together to supply relief materials to Cruz Roja in Baja California.
- Cross-border economic coalitions like the Smart Border Coalition, Arizona-Mexico Commission, Border Trade Alliance, and others champion binational business cooperation.

Government entities are equally important partners. BPP works alongside the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission, International Boundary and Water Commission, North American Development Bank, and Commission for Environmental Cooperation to advance regional priorities. In addition, BPP partners with the extensive consular network of Mexico through its Ventanilla de Salud (Health Window) program, which operates out of Mexican consulates across the United States.

SECTION NINE

BORDER INITIATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONS

The U.S.-Mexico Border region has been the focus of numerous philanthropic organizations over the decades, each playing a unique role in addressing the complex challenges that arise in this dynamic and diverse area. From large, established foundations to community-based nonprofits, these institutions have leveraged their resources and expertise to drive positive change on both sides of the international divide.

One of the earliest major U.S. foundations to engage in cross-border philanthropy was the Ford Foundation. Since the 1960s, the Ford Foundation has supported a wide range of initiatives in the Border region, focusing on areas such as civil rights, education, and economic development. Their investments have helped to foster greater understanding and collaboration between communities on either side of the line.

Similarly, the Rockefeller Foundation has left its mark on the Borderlands, funding various health and agricultural programs over the years. Their efforts have ranged from combating the spread of infectious diseases like dengue fever to improving food security and sustainable farming practices. By taking a holistic, binational approach to these issues, the Rockefeller Foundation has played a vital role in enhancing the well-being of Border residents.

In more recent decades, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has also directed some of its global health and education resources towards the U.S.-Mexico Border region. While the foundation's primary focus may lie beyond the immediate Border area, its investments in areas such as public health infrastructure and academic exchange programs have had a tangible impact on communities in this unique cross-border context.

In the U.S., through the Binational Resiliency Initiative, San Diego Foundation has significantly increased its reach by extending its grantmaking into Mexico in support of the environment in collaboration with the International Community Foundation, which has granted millions of dollars into Baja California.

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) strengthens cross-border collaboration by supporting Latino-led organizations working on topics such as migration, human rights, and economic justice. Through grantmaking and advocacy, HIP mobilizes resources and amplifies community voices on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico Border. For example, the HIP Give bilingual platform connects donors to grassroots initiatives across the Americas, while the HIP Fellows program supports emerging leaders committed to equity and justice in Latino communities, including those along the U.S.-Mexico Border.

The New Mexico HEAL Fund (Healthy Entry for Asylee Lives) unites foundations, donors, and nonprofit leaders in response to the humanitarian crisis affecting migrants and asylum seekers across New Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border. Managed by the New Mexico Foundation, and with leadership from local and national funders, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Thornburg Foundation, Santa Fe Community Foundation, McCune Charitable Foundation, Con Alma Health Foundation, Hispanics in Philanthropy and the U.S.- Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership, the HEAL Fund has deployed more than US$1.6 million since 2021 to support frontline organizations. These grants have enabled direct services such as transportation, shelter, meals, legal aid, and family reunification.

On the Mexican side of the Border, organizations like Fundación Comunitaria de la Frontera Norte, based in Ciudad Juárez, have emerged as prominent players in the philanthropic landscape. This community foundation supports local initiatives in education, health, and community development, providing a vital lifeline for underserved populations. Similarly, the Fundación del Empresariado Chihuahuense (FECHAC) has become a model for business-led philanthropy in Mexico, channeling corporate resources into social programs throughout the state of Chihuahua.

The emergence of cross-border philanthropy has also led to the sophistication of hometown associations in Mexico to drive greater social impact. Some U.S.-based foundations have partnered with migrant hometown associations to match or amplify the community development funds being sent via remittances. Similarly, Mexican nonprofits have worked to engage the diaspora community in the U.S. as donors and volunteers for their initiatives back home.

Other organizations in Mexico rely on the creation of or partnership with a sister organization in the U.S., which is a formal organization that is able to help them solicit and manage funds that can be used for charitable purposes. This model maintains a clear distinction between a U.S. entity and a Mexican nonprofit so that both are in compliance with respective national laws but provides the benefit of allowing increased charitable giving through U.S.-based donors.



In addition to the direct flow of funds and resources between the nonprofit sectors in Mexico and the United States, the network of consular offices maintained by both countries plays an important role in facilitating cross-border philanthropic activities. The network of U.S. consular offices throughout Mexico serves as an important liaison between American philanthropic organizations and Mexican civil society groups. These consulates often provide valuable information, guidance, and connections to help U.S.-based foundations, nonprofits, and individual donors navigate the legal and operational landscape for charitable giving in Mexico.

By leveraging their on-the-ground presence and relationships, U.S. consulates have become important facilitators and champions of philanthropic engagement between the two countries. Similarly, the network of Mexican consular offices across the United States plays a crucial role in supporting Mexican diaspora communities in their philanthropic efforts back home. Like BPP, these consulates often serve as a bridge between American donors and Mexican nonprofit organizations, helping to channel resources and facilitate collaborative initiatives.

These are just a few examples of the models and organizations that span the diverse philanthropic ecosystem that has taken root in the U.S.-Mexico Border region. From large, well-established foundations to nimble, community-based organizations, there are numerous groups that play a vital role in addressing the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in this dynamic and complex geographical space. By fostering cross-border collaboration, channeling resources to where they are needed most, and empowering local communities, these philanthropic organizations have become essential partners in the ongoing effort to build a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future for the Borderlands.



SECTION TEN

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Given the complex, interconnected nature of the challenges facing the Border region, there is a growing recognition of the need for more robust collaboration and coordination among philanthropic organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders.

Innovative models of collective giving, pooled funding, and cross-sectoral partnerships are emerging to drive larger-scale, systemic change. As cities and economies along the Border grow, the Borderlands region presents significant opportunities for philanthropic organizations.

One of the most promising avenues for impact lies in the growing number of collaborative platforms that bring together philanthropists, grantmakers, and nonprofit leaders from both sides of the Border. BPP, for example, has spent years building a network that fosters cross-border exchange and resource-sharing. Philanthropists in the Border region are also experimenting with novel models and tools to drive sustainable change. Impact investing, for instance, has gained traction as a way to blend charitable giving with market-based solutions.

Recognizing the interconnected nature of the challenges facing the Border region, many philanthropic organizations have adopted a more holistic, cross-border perspective in their grantmaking and program design. By taking this systems-level approach, individuals and organizations have been able to tackle complex, multi-faceted issues that transcend national boundaries.

The dynamic nature of the U.S.-Mexico Border region requires organizations to be highly responsive and adaptable in their grantmaking and programming. Whether responding to natural disasters, combating a pandemic impacting both sides of the Border, or mitigating the impacts of climate change, organizations must be nimble in how they deploy funds and resources.

By leveraging binational networks, adopting innovative approaches, addressing systemic issues, fostering cultural exchange, and responding to emerging needs, funders are poised to play a crucial role in shaping a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future for the Borderlands.

SECTION ELEVEN

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ARCACONTINENTAL

CON ALMA HEALTH FOUNDATION

NEW MEXICO FOUNDATION
Healthy Entry for Asylee Lives (HEAL) Fund

ARIZONA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

SMARTBORDER COALITION

Long Ridge Foundation

SENTRE

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U.S.-MEXICO BORDER PHILANTHROPY PARTNERSHIP

Building Prosperity in the Border Region

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