



CONNECTING  
COMMUNITIES  
IN THE AMERICAS  
CONECTANDO COMUNIDADES  
EN AMÉRICA

# Community Foundation Mapping Guide



# Connecting Communities in the Americas

Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA) is an initiative developed by CFLeads, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in 2016 with the vision to create a network of community foundations and partners committed to addressing local and regional challenges across the Americas.

The Inter-American Foundation brought its experience and network focused on community-led development to building knowledge exchanges in Latin America and the Caribbean, while the Mott Foundation funded and supported the U.S. and Canada-based network. The initiative was formerly called Building Broader Communities in the Americas (BBCA) and was renamed in 2021.

The mission of the Connecting Communities in the Americas initiative is to build stronger, more resilient communities throughout the Americas by enhancing the effectiveness of community foundations' responsiveness to them. Through this network, the CCA aspires to work with its partners to develop knowledge, improve practices, and identify and pursue opportunities to broaden and deepen local and international philanthropy.

To that end, Connecting Communities in the Americas strives to strengthen relationships among community foundations and their

partners throughout the region, enhancing their ability to work with their transnational communities — those often characterized by a diaspora population or by migration, whether permanent, temporary or circular.

The CCA works toward these desired outcomes:

- Advance the shared understanding of transnational communities in the hemisphere,
- Strengthen relationships among community foundations and transnational stakeholders to solve common problems,
- Increase and share knowledge about community foundation practices with their local communities, and
- Encourage more effective giving in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This guide explores the different goals for mapping, describes various approaches, and shares some of the results that have emerged from the 11 mapping exercises that Connecting Communities in the Americas supported from 2017 to 2019. Findings suggest that deliberate mapping can help foundations build stronger and more fruitful connections with their communities, improve their programs, develop and strengthen partnerships, and identify potential new donors.

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# Introduction to the Mapping Project

For Connecting Communities in the Americas, mapping is purposeful data gathering of a specific population sector in a defined geographic region that identifies community assets and opportunities, builds relationships, understands aspirations, and inspires initiatives. Its goal is arriving at a nuanced understanding of the relationships and interconnections between people and institutions, and the practices that keep them vibrant and dynamic. In other words, mapping is a process of deepening a foundation's understanding of its community.

In 2017 and 2018, the Inter-American Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation co-funded two rounds of grants that supported 11 mapping projects with sixteen community foundations from Mexico and the U.S., several of whom partnered in order to better understand common transnational communities:

- Arizona Community Foundation (USA)
- Chicago Community Trust (USA)
- Community Foundation for Southern Arizona (USA)
- Corporativa de Fundaciones (Mexico)
- Delaware Community Foundation (USA)
- El Paso Community Foundation (USA)
- Fundación Comunidad (Mexico)
- Fundación Comunitar (Mexico)
- Fundación Comunitaria de la Frontera Norte (Mexico)
- Fundación Comunitaria de Malinalco (Mexico)
- Fundación del Empresariado Sonorense (Mexico, 2 branches)
- International Community Foundation (USA)
- Southwest Florida Community Foundation (USA)
- The Boston Foundation (USA)
- The Minneapolis Foundation (USA)

This guide presents the lessons learned from engaging in mapping research and suggests how future exercises can be conducted.

We begin in **Part I** with a justification for mapping research as a way to help community foundations foster more resilient communities; **Part II** describes the context of transnational communities and four possible approaches to mapping; **Part III** provides a guide for the mapping process; and **Part IV** suggests ways to follow up with the results once mapping is completed.

All of the information presented here is based on the experience of the community foundations that participated in the first two rounds of mapping grants.

We hope that this document serves as an inspiration and a guide to those community foundations and other stakeholders who undertake mapping of their local communities in the future.

# I: Why Do Mapping Research?

What motivates community foundations to undertake such an effort, alone or in collaboration with partners?

The community foundations that participated in the mapping exercises did so to better understand:

- people from their region who now live elsewhere,
- people from other countries who now call their community home, and
- how these communities experience connections across national borders.

Some wanted deeper, more research-based information that they could use to justify and build programs. Still others sought to understand giving patterns of local business leaders or hometown associations, or of corporations that have policies to contribute to local communities.

The 11 original mapping projects completed with the CCA grants can be divided into four types of approaches.

## Communities in Places of Origin

Three of the Mexican community foundations - Comunidar, Corporativa de Fundaciones and Fundación Comunitaria de Malinalco - were motivated to examine their local communities that have high levels of emigration and attempted to understand reasons for migration (push-pull factors), experiences along the way, common destinations, and experiences with repatriation.

## Communities in Places of Destination

In this case, the community foundations in Chicago, Delaware, Southwest Florida and

Boston sought to understand and become more engaged with their local transnational communities that were composed of immigrants and/or diaspora groups.

## Partnerships Between Communities of Origin and Destination

In the case of Comunidad in Mexico and The Minneapolis Foundation in the U.S., the community foundations had already identified a shared transnational connection. Their starting point was to understand the nature of the existing ties and to identify opportunities for the community foundations partners to facilitate and strengthen those connections.

## Communities in the Border Regions

In border communities, every aspect of life, including people, goods, ideas, cuisine and culture, often overlaps and creates a unique identity.

The El Paso Community Foundation and Fundación Comunitaria de la Frontera Norte in Ciudad Juárez partnered with others to explore the attitudes of residents about the nature of their shared identity. On the other hand, three U.S. community foundations in California and Arizona partnered with those in Baja California and Sonora to explore how their businesses interact with nonprofits in corporate philanthropy.

For the most part, these exercises did not focus as strongly on migration, but rather on learning about immediate, daily interactions, practices and attitudes toward their neighbors.

Thus, mapping exercises can help community foundations to:

- **Gain insights** for the design or support of programs, policies, and systems that more effectively meet the needs, build on the assets, and help fulfill the aspirations of a broader range of their residents,
- **Connect with other transnational efforts** already active in their communities (service organizations, diaspora organizations, remittance flows, sister city relationships, academic partnerships, etc.),
- **Promote greater mutual understanding and equity** in their increasingly diverse communities,
- **Uncover potential donors** that may be interested in working through community foundations to support social investment and philanthropic engagement at home, in other countries, or both, and
- **Learn about corporations** that are doing business in the Americas and have employees in several places. These corporations may need help in their charitable giving, employee integration into the communities, or cultural challenges in the workplace.

Implicit in the benefits for community foundations are the benefits for the stakeholders with whom they develop relationships, namely:

- **Migrants and diaspora groups** like hometown associations can work with community foundations in both their communities of residence and origin, and this collaboration can result in social investments that have greater strategic impact.
- **Businesses** can collaborate with one or more partners that offer an intimate knowledge of the community and an ability to navigate challenging cultural

and contextual differences.

- **Universities and service organizations** can deepen their research and community engagement as they partner with community foundations.

It is also worth underlining here that although only U.S. and Mexican community foundations participated in the first two rounds of mapping research, the hope is that foundations throughout the Americas will undertake mapping research as well and be part of the peer learning network that Connecting Communities in the Americas provides, including those in Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada.

## II: Different Contexts, Different Approaches

Each transnational community, whether made of primarily immigrants, diaspora, returned emigrants or families of emigrants, has unique characteristics, history and identity. Transnational communities also experience differing levels of cohesion.

For example, the cultural, ethnic and racial makeup of Latino communities in the United States and Canada varies greatly. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens yet identify with Latin America linguistically and culturally. Those from the Dominican Republic and

Haiti originated from the same island in the Caribbean but speak different languages. In Central and South America, there are also wide differences in language, ethnicity, race and cultural identities.

Connecting Communities in the Americas encourages mappers to delve into the nuances of their transnational communities as learners - open-minded and sensitive to unique identities and voices.

## III: The Mapping Process

Before beginning the mapping planning process, give your team insight into the experiences of the first CCA mapping cohorts by reading the publication Mapping our Transnational Communities: Eleven Examples of Community Foundation Research and reviewing some of the previous mapping project reports. There are excellent ideas that your team can build upon and accommodate to your foundation's needs and strategic vision.

The following are nine recommendations that we make for the planning of your mapping project. We have included questions that you can discuss with your planning team.

### 1) Set clear goals for the research

While the starting point of the mapping exercise is to gather information about the transnational community, the effort must be framed such that its goals are

consistent with the mission and strategic goals of the community foundation. Engage in conversations with your foundation's leadership from the onset in order to identify how the mapping process will add value to the strategic objectives and vision of your institution.

For example, at the Chicago Community Trust, they aligned their mapping project with their strategic goal of closing the Latino, Black and White wealth gap. By mapping the Mexican business owners' philanthropical practices, they were better able to understand how to partner with them in areas within their strategic plan.

In addition, the foundation should have a firm and explicit commitment to engage with the transnational community, not only as an object of study but as an active partner, and not only for the duration of the study but with a longer-term vision. At the same time, the foundation should manage expectations,

both internally and externally, about the likely impact of a mapping exercise.

## WITH YOUR TEAM

1. What motivates our institution to consider undertaking a mapping project? What knowledge do we hope to gain? What relationships do we hope to establish or reinvigorate?
2. What observations or hypotheses about our community's demographics are the starting point for mapping?

### 2) Communicate the purpose of the mapping and its implications throughout your organization

In the long run, support from the community foundation as a whole – its board, senior leadership, staff, donors, as well as actual and potential grantees – will be critical to success. Therefore, it is indispensable that the staff involved in the mapping connect the work to the foundation's mission and goals and seek to align the mapping with other work that is already occurring in the foundation.

An observation that we made after the earlier mapping projects is that the more the foundations CEO and/or project director were engaged with the community during the implementation of the project, the more successfully they were able to continue working with that community beyond the grant period.

### WITH YOUR TEAM

How will we ensure that everyone in our foundation understands why we are doing this mapping project?

### 3) Identify and engage a wide range of partners

Partners both locally and internationally such as these can be key to more meaningful engagement with your transnational community and may also be able to bring additional resources into the project:

- Other **community foundations** may have insight and connections to transnational communities and be able to guide you in your work;
- **Universities** have proven to be an important source of expertise for designing the data gathering and sometimes have professors or students who are interested in being part of your project;
- **Local nonprofits**, including hometown associations, often have already built trust within the community and can help to facilitate relationship-building for the community foundations and researchers;
- **Business leaders and chambers of commerce**, especially from migrant or diaspora communities can offer leadership and philanthropic support for new initiatives; and
- **Consulates** can also provide a valuable connection to local migrant communities.

There are several examples from our former mapping projects that highlight these partnerships. The Delaware Community Foundation worked with the University of Delaware and a network of Latino nonprofits and associations called La Colectiva for their project; in Malinalco, Mexico, they partnered with a local indigenous nonprofit called Instituto el Rincón to conduct community focus groups; the Chicago Community Trust partnered with the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in order to meet Mexican business owners.

Already established networks such as La Colectiva and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce indicate that local families and businesses may already be fairly well connected to each other. In partnership, Comunidad and The Minneapolis Foundation also found very strong existing ties between families from the Mexican town of Axochiapan and those relatives in Minneapolis. However, these support networks may not be existent in some communities and this is where community foundations can play an important role in facilitating some of those connections.

In those cases where the community foundation is developing new relationships with partners, the process of collaborating may get off to a slow start. This can seem to slow down the mapping exercise, but the investment of time in cultivating such partnerships can yield important dividends, not only in terms of the quality of the information gathered but also enhancing the foundation's standing within its community.

#### 4) Invest the time and effort to assess existing data and information

As the mapping work begins it is important for the community foundation to draw upon its partners to determine what information is already available on your target population. The mapping reports of the first eleven projects have already laid a foundation for this research in some places of Mexico and the United States, as well as the summary of these reports, Mapping our Transnational Communities: Eleven Examples of Community Foundation Research. If you already have connections with your target community, now is a great time to invite them into the conversation to find out what they feel the best approach to mapping would be and for what purpose.

#### WITH YOUR TEAM

What information might already exist on this population and who will be responsible for compiling it?

#### WITH YOUR TEAM

1. Who do we know in this community that can lead us in the right direction? Who will contact them and how will we begin the conversation?
2. Think about where partnerships with other community foundations would benefit this process. Are there foundations that can help to mentor you through part of this process? Or that have experience with this particular cultural or national population?

## 5) Define what you need to know

While understanding the context informs the questions that a community foundation wants to answer, you need to consider who could lead the research, what methodology they might use, and how they would overcome challenges along the way.

## 6) Layout a plan for mapping research

After this initial review, you are ready to develop a plan for more rigorous research. The work of some foundations extended beyond a year, as they faced unanticipated challenges and opportunities along the way.

One of the hallmarks of the most successful mapping exercises was the development of a close, collaborative relationship between community foundation staff, the partners who assist with the research, and leaders of the target community. It is important that if you subcontract the mapping research, you continue to be closely involved in designing and implementing the mapping exercises, in order to ensure a shared understanding of the process and that the information presented in the report and to your intended audiences reflects the mission and strategic goals of your community foundation.

The process of gathering information can include both secondary research of already existing information and fieldwork to gain a deeper understanding of the community's lived experiences. There are many ways that the fieldwork of engaging with transnational communities can take place. The foundations that participated in the mapping projects used a variety of methods, including:

- **Surveys** are a common way to engage a number of community members and can be applied in-person or online.

## WITH YOUR TEAM

Based on our mission and strategic goals, and what we know from the context, what question(s) do we want this study to answer (research questions)?

(Online surveys are unfortunately notorious for having very low response rates and need quite a rigorous follow-up). The mapping research done from 2017 to 2019 included various population groups, including local residents, community leaders, nonprofits and businesses, and examples can be provided upon request.

- **Focus groups** or larger town meetings within the communities are methods to engage groups of people in a discussion around specific questions in order to capture a variety of opinions and the interpersonal dynamics around a topic.
- **Interviews** are used with fewer individuals to achieve much deeper knowledge around a topic. Interviews, like focus group discussions, are often recorded and then transcribed for analysis.
- **Site visits** - It is strongly recommended that the community foundation leadership and team visit the community and engage around some of the mapping activities. Although it requires time and sometimes travel, it demonstrates genuine interest in the community and can help facilitate trust-building.
- **Other methods** - There are many other qualitative methods available for deepening your comprehension of your communities, including geographic asset mapping and participatory photography

(see SW Florida Community Foundation report). Many community foundations in Latin America also have direct community programming and have been using participatory methods for years,

which presents for the opportunity for new partnerships in your research (see the Comunidad and Malinalco community foundation reports from Mexico).

## WITH YOUR TEAM AND RESEARCH PARTNERS

1. What, if any, field research do we want to do in order to deepen our understanding of the community?
2. Who can guide us in understanding which methods are best for the type of understanding that we want to have?

### 7. Identify potential challenges

It is important to consider potential challenges inherent in the mapping project, such as lack of trust or cultural knowledge, constraints in time or personnel, low response rates or conflicting foundation priorities. For example, in their fieldwork some foundations have encountered reluctant respondents who do not wish to discuss issues of migration with strangers.

An obvious challenge in 2021 is still the restrictions and risks during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet there are many alternative ways of working. Work with your team to find creative ways to anticipate and minimize these challenges.

### WITH YOUR TEAM

1. What are the potential obstacles to our research? How will we address each one and/or prepare so that these can be minimized?
2. Does our target community know who we are? What might be barriers to their engagement with us and how can we address those barriers?

### 8. Prioritize building relationships and cultivating trust

As we have mentioned earlier, previous mapping grantees have stressed that a critical part of the mapping exercises is cultivating trust with and among partner institutions and the members of their target community, as well as promoting a better understanding of how a community foundation serves its region. Many of the key stakeholders in a transnational community are likely to be unfamiliar with your community foundation, so cultivating new connections based on trust is the key to engagement. This is a process that takes time and cannot be rushed, and these relationships are important both during the research phase of mapping as well as during the dissemination of results with the community and in planning next steps.

As an example, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation found that trust was their biggest challenge in engaging the community that they wanted to learn about most. They decided to follow up their mapping project by inviting a Mexican community foundation to guide them through culturally appropriate ways to engage and build trust.

### WITH YOUR TEAM

1. Who do we know who can help us to build trust with leadership and families in this community?

## 9) Your report: Key findings and recommendations

Once the data is gathered, the final stage of research is the analysis of the information, drawing out the key findings and making recommendations for the community foundation to continue engaging with its community. Again, think ahead of time about what format and information the final report should include so that it is useful for your community foundation's intended audience, mission and strategic goals.

As part of the grant, we also request that you have the final report (executive summary format) translated and readable. Depending on your country, you will want your report available in either Spanish, French or Portuguese, and in English, ensuring that it is useful to the broader Connecting Communities in the Americas.

### WITH YOUR TEAM

1. Who will write the final report and, if that person is external, who in the foundation will ensure that it is in the format and has the information that is pertinent to the foundation's needs?
2. What languages will we need the report in and who will assume that responsibility?

# IV. We have our results - what now?

A completed mapping report offers a wealth of data and insightful analyses, and what Connecting Communities in the Americas has found is a common theme: the growing importance and impact of migration and transnational connections on local communities throughout the region.

However, mapping research should never be an end in itself. The foundation must also have a commitment to transform the knowledge it acquires through mapping into changes in its priorities and practices, which may include grantmaking, programs, community building, leadership development, and fundraising, among other areas.

The following are some of ways that mapping transnational communities has provided new opportunities for participating foundations:

## Stronger and more fruitful connections with communities

Community foundations found that the mapping process strengthened relationships with both individual members of transnational communities and key institutions, both locally and internationally.

For some, such as in Delaware, Jalisco and Monterrey in Mexico, and Southwest Florida, this was their first direct engagement with their transnational community. For others in Morelos, Sonora, Arizona and San Diego, the process not only enhanced their knowledge but also their legitimacy as community builders among these communities.

For community foundations with pre-established connections, mapping provided an opportunity to expand, deepen, and revitalize their relationships.

The mapping exercise at the Boston Foundation opened up deeper conversations with other Caribbean communities in their metropolitan area, while foundations along the U.S.-Mexican border were able to deepen their understanding of the attitudes among very integrated transnational communities.

**Lesson:** Mapping, especially when inclusive and collaborative, helps us to engage in a meaningful way our transnational communities.

## Creative ways to learn about local communities

We asked participants about novel approaches to mapping. Here is what Southwest Florida Community foundation had to say:

*“Our research was unique in several ways... to implement interviews and surveys we partnered with local nonprofits that had strong relationships and trust with transnational community members. We used a community collective impact question set to guide focus group discussion on the interviews. Our approaches focused on connecting with people in the transnational community in purposeful and innovative ways.”*

Many community foundations in Latin America have more direct experience in community development and can guide others in effective, culturally appropriate and respectful ways to engage. An example is with Fundación Comunitaria in Malinalco, who was able to document very deeply felt experiences of its communities through town meetings and personal interviews, based relationship-building that they had developed over years of work.

## Results that impact program design

In terms of programming, there is an interesting variation in the influence of the mapping exercises. For those Mexican community foundations that looked at their local communities of origin, they came to regard migration as a crosscutting issue like human rights or gender that should be taken into account in all program development and grantmaking. This reflects how widespread the phenomenon of migration is for the participating communities, with powerful and far-reaching effects.

For some community foundations in the United States, taking the step to better understand their transnational community and demonstrating both good faith and genuine interest generated greater legitimacy for their efforts among the target population.

**Lesson:** Mapping can create meaningful contacts a sector of the population previously disconnected or deepening our understanding of a community that we already serve.

## Opportunities to reconnect with earlier alliances

The Chicago Community Trust has a history of engaging with its Latino and immigrant communities, yet they found value in undertaking a mapping exercise that would reconnect them and offer new information. When asked how mapping had enriched their engagement with transnational communities, they responded:

*“...engagement with transnational communities has depended on key [CC]Trust staff to move it forward. At moments, there have been gaps and the connections have weakened. The mapping work has allowed the current staff to reconnect with past partners and bring relevant information to the*

*development of our new strategic plan with the intent of institutionalizing these efforts.”*

**Lesson:** Community engagement and relationship-building is an ongoing effort and benefits from new approaches.

## New partnerships

We cannot emphasize enough the development of collaborative relationships as a key element of the mapping exercises and working with transnational communities. A number of the foundations found that working with local nonprofits serving these communities was the best way to connect, thus strengthening the work of these smaller institutions as well.

The El Paso Community Foundation shared this experience about new partnerships they were able to create:

*“Although we had a history of working across the border ..., the mapping exercise provided us the opportunity to collaborate with two new partners, Familias Triunfadoras, a women-led nonprofit organization in Texas with a mission to empower women and families, and the Agencia de Estadística de Mercados S.C., a research firm in Ciudad Juarez. The results have provided the much-needed empirical data on what it means to live in a binational community and confirms border experiences that for many years had been recounted in an anecdotal or subjective manner.”*

**Lesson:** Undertaking a mapping in a spirit of collaboration of true partnerships provides an opportunity to create and/or deepen relationships between institutions, creating momentum and future opportunities to work together.

## New opportunities for donor engagement

Undertaking mapping research also provides the opportunity to identify potential donors and less traditional philanthropic practices within migrant/diaspora communities and among other local or even transnational entities. The Delaware Community Foundation shared about how they are connecting the learning from mapping to creating donor awareness:

*“It’s given us greater insight about where there are needs and assets that can be built upon through our own grantmaking as well*

*as that of interested co-funders... We are beginning targeted conversations with both individual and institutional donors in the Delaware community about how they can be a part of this work with us.”*

**Lesson:** The mapping process can provide an important impetus for the development of new, innovative programs to engage with the transnational community, and to mobilize resources to support them.

# Conclusion

Conducting mapping research with and about transnational communities through Connecting Communities in the Americas has fostered new partnerships – both locally and internationally – for more effective local impact. In today’s world where so many residents are deeply rooted in more than one place, tapping into those rich cultural worlds while assuring access to resources, networks and possibilities can contribute to safer, more resilient communities.

We hope that this Mapping Guide will help to lay the framework for community foundations and other interested institutions to create deeper knowledge and more meaningful connections to their transnational communities. From the eleven mapping projects that were completed between 2017 and 2019, we have a foundation upon which we are able to design research that is so necessary to our work.

# Additional Resources

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