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# EMBRACING OUR TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES:

A CASE STUDY *of* FIVE COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS



CONNECTING  
COMMUNITIES  
IN THE AMERICAS

CONECTANDO  
COMUNIDADES  
EN AMÉRICA

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## PHOTO CREDITS:

CFLeads, Collaboratory, Corporativa de Fundaciones, Fundación Comunidad, Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco, Delaware Community Foundation.

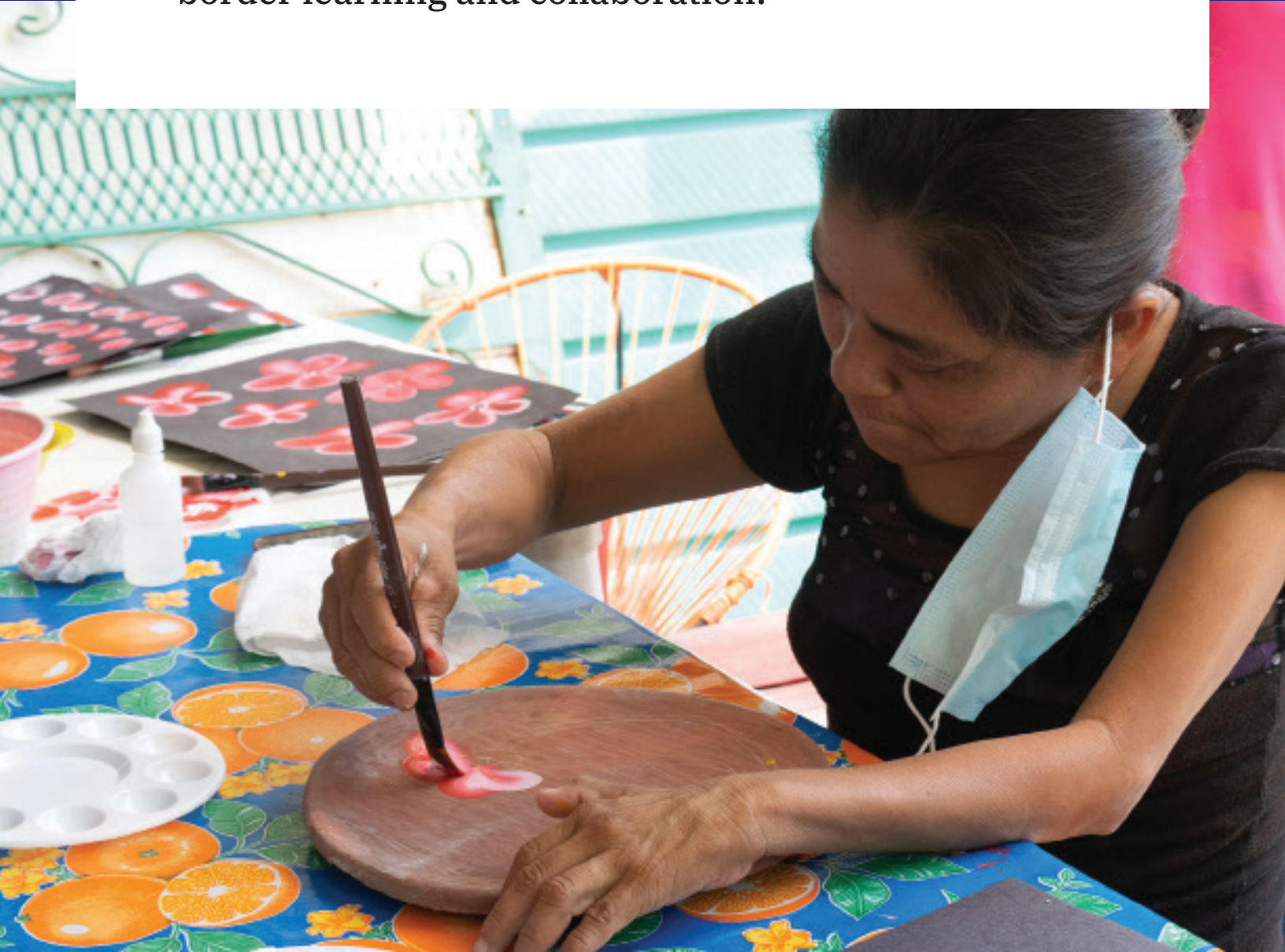


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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA) is an initiative housed at CFLeads that works to inspire and strengthen community foundations and their partners for local impact as they address issues that transcend borders. Continuously seeking opportunities to share strategies across countries and learn from each other, CCA is a model for cross-border learning and collaboration.



With support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Inter-American Foundation, CCA was able to provide grants to several community foundations in Mexico and the United States between 2018 and 2023. These grants supported mapping research and follow-up action projects to help community foundations better understand and more effectively engage with their transnational communities – those made up of immigrants, refugees, diaspora groups, people in transit or returning to their countries of origin and whose hearts and homes lie in more than one place.

This case study report shares key learnings from a cohort of five community foundation grant recipients working to meaningfully engage with their transnational communities and the local nonprofits that support them.

The data collection consisted of notes from online cohort meetings, annual interviews, periodic reports and updates, and an evaluation report from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy after a half-day in-person reflection with the foundations in February 2023.

### **The participating community foundations were:**

- *Collaboratory*, Fort Myers, Florida, U.S.
- *Comunidad*, Cuernavaca, state of Morelos, Mexico
- *Corporativa de Fundaciones*, Guadalajara, state of Jalisco, Mexico
- *Delaware Community Foundation*, Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.
- *Fundación Comunitario Malinalco*, Malinalco, Edo. De México, Mexico

After working with the cohort, the mapping-to-action process has resulted in several key takeaways for community foundations:

- 1 Migration intersects deeply with other areas of community development such as education, health, economic mobility and climate resilience.
- 2 Building relationships with community members required more time, presence, and consistency to build trust than anticipated.
- 3 Although community foundations are uniquely positioned to partner across countries, more learning is required to find ways to do that effectively.

We hope that by sharing this information, more community foundations and their local partners will be inspired to contribute to this work and share with others across countries and regions for the benefit of all our local communities.



# EMBRACING OUR TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES:

## A CASE STUDY *of* FIVE COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

### INTRODUCTION: CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN THE AMERICAS

Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA) is an initiative housed at CFLeads that works to inspire and strengthen community foundations and their partners for local impact as they address issues that transcend borders. It emerged from informal conversations between community foundation leaders, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Inter-American Foundation about the potential for cross-border partnerships in identified areas of interest.

Since then, CCA has developed into a vibrant group of community foundations and support organizations from Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, St. Croix and the United States that meet online (through a Peer Resource Sharing program) and in person (at symposia and convenings). Continuously seeking opportunities to share strategies across countries and learn from each other, CCA is a model for cross-border learning and collaboration.

## THE CCA MAPPING PROJECT

Migration patterns across the Americas are becoming increasingly influenced by the negative effects of climate change, drug and human trafficking, and a sense of hopelessness concerning the ability to find a safe, dignified and economically stable life in one's home country. Yet, transnational communities – those made up of immigrants, refugees, diaspora groups, people in transit or returning to their countries of origin and whose hearts and homes lie in more than one place – have often been invisible to local data and therefore to essential services and community stories (Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy report).

### The CCA Mapping Project asked the following fundamental questions:

- How can community foundations connect with each other across borders to acknowledge and strengthen our transnational communities?

- Is there added value in this?
- If so, what is it?

With this vision shared by CFLeads, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Inter-American Foundation, CCA was able to provide grants for 11 research projects between 2018 and 2020 that led to collecting and updating quantitative and qualitative data on the experience of transnational communities in Mexico and the United States. Several of the projects were based on collaboration between community foundations across the Mexico-U.S. border. The Inter-American Foundation supported the projects in Latin America, and the Mott Foundation supported those in the U.S.

In 2021, five of the community foundations that conducted mapping research began “mapping-to-action” projects, which involved more direct engagement with transnational communities. These five foundations – two in the United States and three in Mexico – participated as a cohort in regular online conversations over the



**“Perspectives” (the mapping report) helped us build more connections in the community...gave us greater insight about where there are needs and assets that can be built upon...and the importance the Latino community will continue to play in the future growth and success of the county.”**

DELAWARE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

## THE PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS WERE:

### COLLABORATORY

*Fort Myers, Florida, U.S.*

### COMUNIDAD

*Cuernavaca, state of Morelos, Mexico*

### CORPORATIVA DE FUNDACIONES

*Guadalajara, state of Jalisco, Mexico*

### DELAWARE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

*Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.*

### FUNDACIÓN COMUNITARIO MALINALCO

*Malinalco, Edo. De México, Mexico*

two years of the project, culminating in an in-person seminar in Guadalajara, Mexico in February 2023.

The experience of these five community foundations in exploring how their institutions can become more closely connected to their transnational communities is the focus of this report. We examine the “mapping-to-action” process the community foundations went through and highlight their learnings about meaningfully engaging with communities they may not have been connected to before.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study research was to identify key learnings of five community foundations as they worked toward finding ways to meaningfully engage with their transnational communities.

**Qualitative in nature, we explored the experience of the community foundations based on these four research questions:**

**1** How have community foundations used their mapping research to inform steps toward deeper engagement with more community members?

**2** How did experiences along the way lead to changes in their approaches and degrees of success?

**3** How did culture play a role in the ways that community foundations engaged with their communities?

**4** How did the relationship-building between community foundations strengthen the work they each did locally?

## DATA COLLECTION

The information gathered came from a variety of sources, including notes from online cohort meetings, annual interviews, periodic reports and updates, and an evaluation report from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy (hereafter Johnson Center) after a half-day in-person session with the foundations in February 2023. Staff from each community foundation reviewed their respective section to ensure the information was true to their own project goals and experiences.



The community foundations used the findings from their mapping research to design action projects that would help them more closely engage with people in their communities. These action projects took place over two years, and the cohort met regularly online to deepen relationships with one another. CCA facilitated these meetings to create space for sharing experiences and receiving peer feedback.

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In Mexico, Fundación Comunidad and Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco were both accustomed to operating direct programs in communities and planned to work closely with groups of people with lived experience in migration. In Morelos, this meant promoting gender equity through small-scale production among women. In Malinalco, the foundation sought to co-finance community-led projects that had some funding from remittances sent by family members in the United States.

Also in Mexico, Corporativa de Fundaciones chose to focus more on cross-border relations, with the intention of forming formal partnerships with Collaboratory and other community foundations to build understanding about migration from Mexico and how to better support groups of people from the state of Jalisco in their respective regions.

The following section outlines the learnings from the mapping-to-action process of these five community foundations and is divided into four parts:

#### **A. FIRST STEPS: ENGAGING WITH HUMILITY**

#### **B. ENVISIONING AND THEN READJUSTING: TAKING IT STEP BY STEP**

#### **C. MI PATIO: BUILDING ON LOCAL CULTURE AND ASSETS**

#### **D. REIMAGINING COLLABORATION ACROSS BORDERS**

Interspersed among these four sections are case studies of each of the five community foundation projects.

### **A. FIRST STEPS: ENGAGING WITH HUMILITY**

One learning from the mapping projects was how little the community foundations knew about newcomers, or those who had transnational experiences, in their communities. For Collaboratory, this became painfully apparent during a visit by their Mexican colleagues from Guadalajara, Mexico. Walking through a local market in Hendry County, whose salespeople were primarily Mexican in origin, the Mexican colleagues had no problems communicating with them in their own language and conversing about their life stories. However, as soon as the tall, white colleague came walking up to the stands speaking English, many were more hesitant to engage in conversation. This became a pivotal moment for Collaboratory to better understand its role in working with its transnational communities and starting from the position of a learner rather than an expert became key in how the grantees engaged with their community members.

Because some of the foundations did not have previously established relationships with their population of focus, they knew they needed to slowly gain their trust. Fundación Comunidad, for example, had not previously worked in the municipality of Axochiapan, Morelos, where they knew there was a connecting stream of migration to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Being a community foundation that was accustomed to operating direct programs for community-building in other parts of the state, it was clear to them that they had to begin slowly building trust before they would be in the position to offer a collaborative partnership.



**Our rural counties are home to some of the largest agricultural enterprises in the nation. Yet little is known or understood about the region, particularly its transnational communities.... We didn't have the relationships that we needed to best support immigrants/migrants."**

COLLABORATORY

They found that there was more distrust than expected for a number of reasons, including perceived broken promises about municipal and other entities that ran "in and out" projects rather than investing in relationships and economic growth over time. Fundación Comunidad shared what they learned they needed to be doing:

— *To reach the community with the openness to listen, from the curiosity to discover its most intrinsic values and capabilities. Have the patience to come back again and again, building from the ground up.*

— *To dare to experiment with other forms of social cohesion, not only from speeches and words. Through music, art, dance and food, we managed to generate bonds of trust and collaboration between us.*

— *To reach the migrant community from a "we" perspective, allowing us to find, together with them, ways to strengthen the social fabric in the Axochiapan and Minneapolis regions, to work toward trust based on empathy...*

This approach meant viewing community members as partners instead of beneficiaries and recognizing that local knowledge is a community's greatest asset. In Florida and Guadalajara, the foundations sought out local organizations already working with the populations to guide them in how to best carry out their projects:

— *Building trust with our target audience had to be approached in more sensitive ways and through local allies. (Collaboratory)*

— *It is essential that people of the community are the ones who should have the primary role in these processes, defining and co-creating together with other stakeholders who want to support them. (Corporativa de Fundaciones)*

# DELAWARE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

## DELAWARE, U.S.A.

The Delaware Community Foundation (DCF) saw an opportunity to support the local Latino community and entrepreneurs in Sussex County through the emergence of La Plaza in Georgetown, an idea that was already developing and that they had been invited to through their earlier mapping project. Their vision was a prosperous economy defined and driven by its local Latino leaders.

Key to their approach was a commitment to focus on community assets. Latinos in Sussex County have many assets that enable them to put down roots, solve problems, take chances, expand their sense of self-sufficiency and add value to the larger community. The DCF is committed to continuing to support these communities, and to leverage our organizational assets to help immigrants successfully integrate into a community.

**THEIR MAPPING RESEARCH ALSO SHOWED THAT IN SUSSEX COUNTY, 67.8% OF LATINOS WERE PARTICIPATING IN THE LABOR FORCE, COMPARED WITH ONLY 56.3% OF THE COUNTY'S WHOLE POPULATION.**

The initial proposal for a two-year project was to support the creation of a Mercado Latino in the town of Georgetown in Sussex County. The community foundation would offer fiscal sponsorship and marketing/communications support, giving visibility to the project, and would also serve on the Core Team that led the design and implementation of the Mercado. A community member envisioned a two-story property with commercial space on the ground floor and an apartment on the second.

But as plans for the Mercado Latino (now called La Plaza) unfolded, the Core Team learned that the idea was not as well accepted in the wider community as they thought. The idea of a physical structure was tabled, and the team spent more time in conversation with residents to learn about their wants and needs. The revised plan was to provide direct education and support to Latino entrepreneurs.





This required DCF to modify the activities and budget of their CCA grant, which was discussed and approved in the spirit of trust-based philanthropy.

Today, La Plaza is not a mercado in the traditional sense, but a nonprofit organization that has provided business training, personalized coaching and access to capital to more than 260 small businesses in Sussex County. It has also formed the Delaware Alliance of Latino Entrepreneurs to serve its community's economic interests.

In retrospect, the La Plaza board had not taken the time to talk to local residents about what they wanted to see.... We were reminded that you must have boots on the ground. You can't just be making decisions in your office or with a committee that's removed from the issue at hand.

**As DCF President & CEO Stuart Comstock-Gay reflected: It's a lesson we often have to learn over and over again - you have to be close to the community, you have to there for the long haul and you have to be humble. You must be able to say, 'help me understand what your strengths are and what you need to be more successful.'**

## B. ENVISIONING AND THEN READJUSTING: TAKING IT STEP BY STEP

The CCA mapping-to-action process has been largely experimental, focusing on new ways to build relationships with communities. All grantees adjusted their projects based on what they learned from the community, wanting to be sensitive and responsive to community voice and direction.

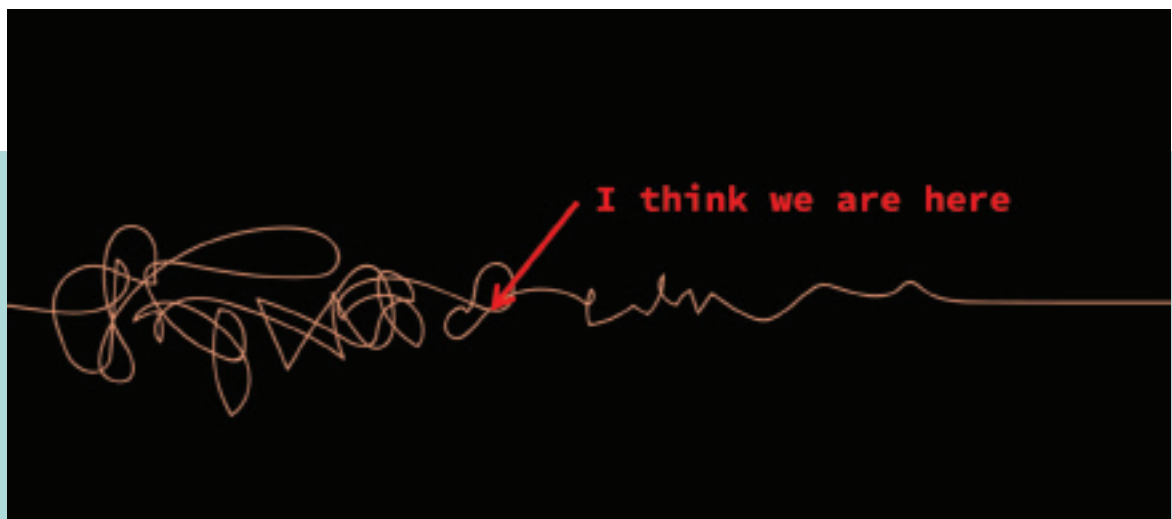
As grantmakers, CCA and CFLeads wanted to afford the flexibility needed for truly trust-based philanthropy with our grantee partners. We shared our priorities for the action projects in the call for projects – for example, that the projects should be focused on direct engagement rather than additional research – but the funding could be used as each grantee saw fit, including for staff salaries and other operational costs. When grantees contacted us about project changes, it was often through a video conversation

rather than a brief written request as to why the project changes were needed.

### **The grantees later reported their views on this approach:**

— *This experience gave us the ability to be flexible. For example, we had a project in mind that turned out to not be in line with what the community needed. We listened and adapted...Changing the focus from land/building development to direct education and support of Latino entrepreneurs. This demonstrated that the community was driving the process, and that we wanted to support its needs – not impose upon them what we thought was needed... (Delaware Community Foundation)*

— *Realizing that not everything that you plan in a project is something that you're going to do or necessarily should be done... allowing ourselves that space to be vulnerable in the project and realizing that we do not know everything and that not everything is going to work; however, finding a lot of learning in that. (Collaboratory)*



*At a seminar in Guadalajara, Mexico, Collaboratory shared this image as how they viewed their journey.*



# CORPORATIVA DE FUNDACIONES

## JALISCO, MEXICO

Corporativa de Fundaciones, a leader in nonprofit capacity-building in Mexico, was interested in finding new ways for foundations to collaborate across borders. Their study on migration from Jalisco revealed several U.S. cities that have a strong connection with their home state and whose work could be strengthened by community foundation partnerships. Largely exploratory in nature, the focus of this project was on creating cross-border partnerships to determine how Corporativa could help create bonds between people who had migrated from Jalisco to the United States and help community foundations to better communicate their services to immigrant communities.

Originally, the foundation had identified two community foundations as allies in the United States, hoping to create a formal alliance with them. The plan was to organize joint events with groups of migrants from the state of Jalisco in those areas and create visual materials to introduce transnational communities to the services of community foundations. In the end, only one of the community foundations was able to commit fully to the project, while the other had to put it on hold due to internal transitions.

Even with a commitment to the project, it was harder than expected for the foundations from different countries and contexts to identify concrete ways of working together. What made the biggest impact for the project was visiting each other's foundations. The Corporativa CEO and project director visited Collaboratory in Fort Myers, Florida in early 2022 for in-person relationship building and site visits

with local nonprofits that serve the Mexican immigrant community.

**BOTH GROUPS LATER AGREED THAT THIS VISIT WAS KEY IN DEFINING COMMON VISIONS AND OBJECTIVES, AND THAT IDEALLY IT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GRANT PERIOD.**

As willing as each party was to collaborate, they did not truly get a sense of each other's perspectives and the potential to work together until they found themselves in the same physical space over a few days. Collaboratory then brought a group of local nonprofit leaders to Guadalajara in early 2023 for the same purpose.

Meanwhile, in Guadalajara, Corporativa continued to have conversations with government agencies and local nonprofits that work with migrants, most of whom were coming from Central America. The Florida visit and these conversations in Mexico helped Corporativa understand the multiple sectors that needed to be working in collaboration so that people in migration could access the services they require on a day-to-day basis. They also recognized the importance of having members of migrant communities be a part of these conversations.

Corporativa de Fundaciones continues to see themselves as being able to help community foundations in the United States understand the phenomenon of migration from Mexico and offer capacity-building opportunities to them and to the local nonprofits with whom they work.

## ¿What unites us?

- Florida and Jalisco are important states for each of their countries. They are both large agricultural producers, especially in terms of sugar cane production.
- In recent decades, migration between the two states has intensified.
- In general, Mexicans represent a growing migratory group that faces several challenges.



**Our experience was really that of exploration and we learned many things, for example that building trust with this population had to be done more sensitively and through local partners.**

# COLLABORATORY

## FLORIDA, U.S.A.

Collaboratory's mapping project, which focused on neighborhoods in inland Hendry County, revealed that the foundation needed to learn more from and about its local rural residents – many of whom were temporary agricultural field workers from Mexico, and others who had been in the area for generations. The Southwest Florida Community Foundation (now Collaboratory) was also experiencing a contextual and identity shift in its strategic vision and approach, with a bold commitment to solve all the region's social problems in 18 years. This commitment resulted in constant iteration of what their action project needed to be and how it would relate to the current and future work of Collaboratory in reaching their 18-year goal.

Their early mapping research revealed that the immigrant population in southwest Florida had grown steadily by 1.5% over the past several years and that those from Latin America continue to make up more

than 73% of its foreign-born population. In southwest Florida, this is an estimated total of 186,097 individuals, or 14% of the total population (Collaboratory presentation, February 2023). This growing population and its vital contribution to the region's development could not be ignored by Collaboratory and its strategic planning.

Two actions that Collaboratory took were to continue supporting and hosting a regional Immigration Learning Community made up of 50-60 local leaders who provided direct services to immigrants, and supporting an Immigrant Entrepreneur Cohort focused on helping immigrant-owned businesses grow and become more connected to opportunities. Many of the entrepreneurs for the cohort were referred by the learning community members.

Despite these networks, Collaboratory realized that they did not have the relationships needed to best support immigrants/migrants in Southwest Florida. Through the action project, Collaboratory connected with the Mexican community foundation Corporativa de Fundaciones, which helped Collaboratory learn more about Mexican culture, reasons for migration and even the limitations of their own role in supporting this community. During a visit from their Mexican colleagues, they stopped by a local Mexican market and a nonprofit that works to support farmworkers in Florida to listen to personal stories and become familiar with local assets and needs.





It became evident that simply entering a community and approaching people with a desire for conversation was not enough, and that trust-building was going to take longer than anticipated.

**ONE OF COLLABORATORY'S BIGGEST LESSONS FROM THE ACTION PROJECT WAS TO GO WHERE THE ENERGY IS, EVEN IF IT TAKES THEM IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION THAN THE ONE ORIGINALLY DEFINED IN THE GRANT APPLICATION.**

They iterated on their project plan numerous times and, as a result, were able to foster deeper and stronger relationships across the community which will have a greater impact on serving the transnational population in Southwest Florida.

**We now have a clearer sense of community and the need to invest in deeper relationship building...As a result of this project, a key learning we have had was the need to develop and transition leadership of the efforts to support the Southwest Florida immigrant community to a grass roots organization working directly with immigrants and refugees.**

“

**The work engendered a deeper, immediate appreciation for the assets and capacities of their communities, especially the Mexican diaspora community. It also strengthened support for a core issue: making visible the many dimensions of migrant and transnational communities that are often made invisible.”**

JOHNSON CENTER EVALUATION REPORT



## C. MI PATIO: BUILDING ON LOCAL CULTURE AND ASSETS

During the final evaluation session, all the grantee participants felt that they had gained a deeper understanding of the human stories and contributions of the communities that they had worked with over two years. Participants also agreed that this work could result in important shifts in how people with lived experience in migration are viewed, both in their places of destination and of origin.

As mentioned earlier, the Delaware Community Foundation had focused their mapping research on community assets from the very beginning, acknowledging that not only are newcomers vital to the shifting economy in their state, but that they also contribute to the richness of the culture there:

— *Latinos enhance Sussex County with their strong work ethic and family values. They are investing in Sussex County. They are working hard at jobs others don't want, opening businesses, sharing culture and cuisine, buying houses and paying taxes. (Delaware Community Foundation)*

In southwest Florida, the foundation was able to more deeply appreciate not only the value of temporary workers who provide the human power required for the vast farmlands, but also the immense sacrifices those workers made in leaving families behind, enduring arduous and sometimes perilous journeys, and living in situations where their welfare was in the hands of their employers. Many of these workers described how they sent portions of their earnings back to family in their home countries, contributing to their welfare in the form of remittances. The earlier mapping projects

highlighted the importance of this additional income back home in providing homes, school supplies, care for elderly family members, and family businesses. These possibilities are limited for many without at least temporary migration elsewhere.

In Morelos, Mexico, the work of Fundación Comunidad in gender equity was transformative for many women who either did not seem aware of their own potential or who felt restricted by prevalent gender norms:

— *What makes me deeply proud is the development of women ... from their possibilities, dreams, and abilities - and not from their deficiencies. It makes me very, very, very happy to see possibilities for change arising from their leadership and initiatives, where no one believed it was possible, neither the migrant community [in the U.S.], nor they themselves. (Johnson Center evaluation report)*

These women, as well as community members from the other projects, expressed gratitude for finally being “seen and heard” within a context where invisibility seemed to be a way of life. As is mentioned below, their patios became their spatial asset for working and building in collaboration.

# FUNDACIÓN COMUNIDAD

## MORELOS, MEXICO

Fundación Comunidad, located in Cuernavaca, just south of Mexico City, had a unique perspective of transnational communities where there was a clear connection between one of the municipalities in Morelos called Axochiapan (oxxo-chee-ah'-pan) and a population from that same municipality residing in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

From the beginning of the mapping project, Comunidad built a relationship with the Minneapolis Foundation, visiting them in person to make connections and explore

possibilities for collaboration in support of the community, both in the states of origin and destination. Comunidad's mapping project revealed much of the data around push and pull factors for migration between Morelos and Minnesota. For their action project, the Comunidad staff wanted to learn more about the human side of the story and connect with a region marked by political campaigning and loss of trust.

As a community foundation that also operates direct programs in the region, they chose to work in two towns within



**Projects had come but they did not give any hope that they would be finished. They no longer followed up. In any type of support or whatever, they came two or three times and that's it...and in this case, well, they keep coming. With the workshops we go little by little.**

the municipality of Axochiapan to explore opportunities to support groups of residents – mostly women – in building solidarity and economic self-management and sustainability. In the end, they chose to work in Telixtac, an Indigenous community that has historically produced clay products (comales, anafres, tubs, figurines, etc.), and Marcelino Rodríguez, a migrant town that had been settled during the hacienda era and is one of the main fig producers of the state.

In both towns, the women had rich personal histories, skills, initiative and the desire to see their communities grow. However, they seemed detached from each other and from a sense of community, much less trusting of an external institution.

Together, they talked about the reasons that so many family members left their region to work elsewhere, and about the right to do so. But, as Comunidad's president insists, there must also be the right not to migrate. For that to happen, social and economic networks need to be built in collaboration and with a common vision.

**COMUNIDAD WORKED WITH THE TWO GROUPS OF WOMEN OVER THE TWO YEARS, SLOWLY AND RESPECTFULLY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST AND LETTING THE MOMENTUM OF EACH GROUP GUIDE THEM.**

In Telixtac, el patio became a critical, safe space for the women where their husbands have slowly allowed them time to meet, learn and imagine a different world for themselves and their children. Outdoors next to the house, it was their space to gather, share stories and build upon their vision. Women chose their own products to make, refine, and eventually sell locally: clay comales for making tortillas, embroidered blouses, clay and wooden figures.

In Marcelino Rodríguez, the women experimented with products made from figs – marmalades, salsas, even decorating cakes with them for special events. Both groups worked on a business model, continuously refining and expanding.

Through Comunidad, they will explore opportunities to export some of the products to Minneapolis through family and neighbors there, thus creating a new connection of solidarity.

For these women, migration is a fact of life. The question is how to connect in ways that create bonds of trust and support, make community leadership flourish, and succeed in changing traditional norms.

## D. REIMAGINING COLLABORATION ACROSS BORDERS

The CCA action projects have brought to light three areas of potential collaboration across borders:

### 1 **Between groups of people with cultural ties between the countries of origin and destination, with community foundations as facilitators**

The first area is best demonstrated through the Morelos-Minnesota project and was possible because of previous knowledge about migration from Axochiapan to Minneapolis over decades. This gave Fundación Comunidad and the Minneapolis Foundation a reason to work together on the mapping research so that they could better understand the push/pull factors and current realities of migration.

As we see in the case of Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco below, community foundations also have the potential to establish these relationships through the ties that members of the local communities have

themselves. In both cases, however, gaining trust as a viable partner for cross-border, community-led projects is a huge task and one that requires a long-term vision.

### 2 **Between community foundations, through peer learning cohorts**

A second area of collaboration we identified is through peer learning cohorts, such as those offered by Connecting Communities in the Americas to its grantees. During the grant period, the grantees meet regularly online for relationship-building time and to discuss the progress, successes and challenges of their projects. Here are some comments about the value of this peer learning process that came out during the participatory evaluation session with the Johnson Center and the grantees:

— *Not just focus on the project, but also give ourselves time - to learn and to co-create with other community foundations.*

— *Even though they were all on Zoom, the monthly cohort calls to build relationships ... That intentionality, the way those calls were hosted, one-to-one or organization-*



**The fact of opening ourselves to get to know other community foundations opened us up to another understanding of local impact and context. This widened our perspective...”**



*to-organization first to build relationships before jumping in to talking about our projects. That level of building connectivity between the cohort was super valuable.*

### **3 Between community foundations, through direct partnerships.**

The third area of collaboration that the CCA action projects have highlighted is between community foundations of different countries. Despite best intentions and commitment to collaboration, the foundations found it challenging to co-define concrete plans with their partners within the two-year time period. Collaboratory

and Corporativa de Fundaciones agreed that the visits to each other's foundations were not only valuable but necessary for relationship-building and strategizing and that having them at the beginning of the project period rather than at the end would have enabled them to establish common objectives much more quickly. CCA also offers other opportunities for community foundations to collaborate, at least short term, through its Learning Exchange grants program, with the hope that over time, more and more foundations will be able to establish deeper and longer-term collaborative relationships.

# COMMUNITY FOUNDATION MALINALCO

## EDO. DE MÉXICO, MEXICO

Malinalco is a municipality in the state of Mexico, located about 100 km southwest of Mexico City. The results of the mapping study, *Migration in Malinalco*, showed how migrants are not only one of the most important drivers of the local economy but have triggered transformations in the ways of living on both sides of the border.

The follow-up project, called *For a Malinalco without Borders*, aimed to generate cross-border collaboration networks between local residents and migrants from Malinalco who are residing in the United States and who are interested in developing and promoting community initiatives back home. As a first step, the foundation held a series of participatory dialogue sessions with migrants who had returned to Malinalco and with their families. In these sessions, specific information was collected that revealed the dynamics of cross-border interaction and the ways of life in the United States. They also discovered that the people from Malinalco do not reside in the same communities in the United States, but rather live all over the country.

As a second step, the foundation published a call for projects partially supported by remittances from relatives in the United States, and which would be matched up to \$1,500 USD. It was important that the projects promoted the development of

leadership capacities in key stakeholders and had a socio-environmental focus. Using a community development framework, the foundation accompanied each community group to develop their mission and vision statements, prepare a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and a roadmap for solutions. They also offered several personalized sessions for each project group.

Five groups with community projects participated, and the next challenge was to contact their relatives and networks in the United States to talk about the projects and seek additional funds. Three of the five groups succeeded, with the following observations:

- There was initial mistrust towards the foundation as a reliable institution for managing resources.
- There was a perception that the foundation could jeopardize the immigration status of some of the relatives in the United States due to the personal data that could be collected.
- Some of the migrants showed more interest in other types of projects, such as patron saint festivals and community traditions, instead of socio-environmental projects.



The groups that managed to receive some funding from family members on the other side of the border identified strategies that were most successful:

- Direct communication with family and friends
- Elaboration of videos where the scope of the project was explained
- Publication of the donation campaign on social networks

**IN THE END, ALTHOUGH THE AMOUNTS OF SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY PROJECTS WERE MODEST, IT WAS A VERY IMPORTANT FIRST STEP IN IMAGINING A CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT.**

Throughout the process, the Malinalco Community Foundation also began to be viewed and trusted as a channel of communication between the migrant population living in the United States and their relatives who are in the municipality of Malinalco.

# CONCLUSION

The mapping-to-action process has resulted in several important takeaways for community foundations that can be appreciated across regions:



**1 Migration intersects deeply with other areas of community development such as education, health, economic mobility and climate resilience.**

Community foundations who have worked with CCA have realized that one does not need to adopt “migration” as a new or separate line of work. In fact, children, adolescents, the elderly, people who are working or studying and have lived experience in migration also have needs across areas of foundation work (e.g. health and education), while making important contributions to the richness of the local culture and economy, no matter where they live.

At Comunidad they reported:

— *With the mapping project we raised awareness of how to integrate the migration perspective and the notion of transnational communities in all of our projects from now on.*

**2 Building relationships with community members required more time, presence, and trust-building than anticipated.**

Relationships, relationships, relationships! Community foundations are unable to serve whole communities unless they know what those communities consist of and how they are changing over time. Investing the time, energy and funds for direct engagement is critical. Often the best partners are the local nonprofits themselves.

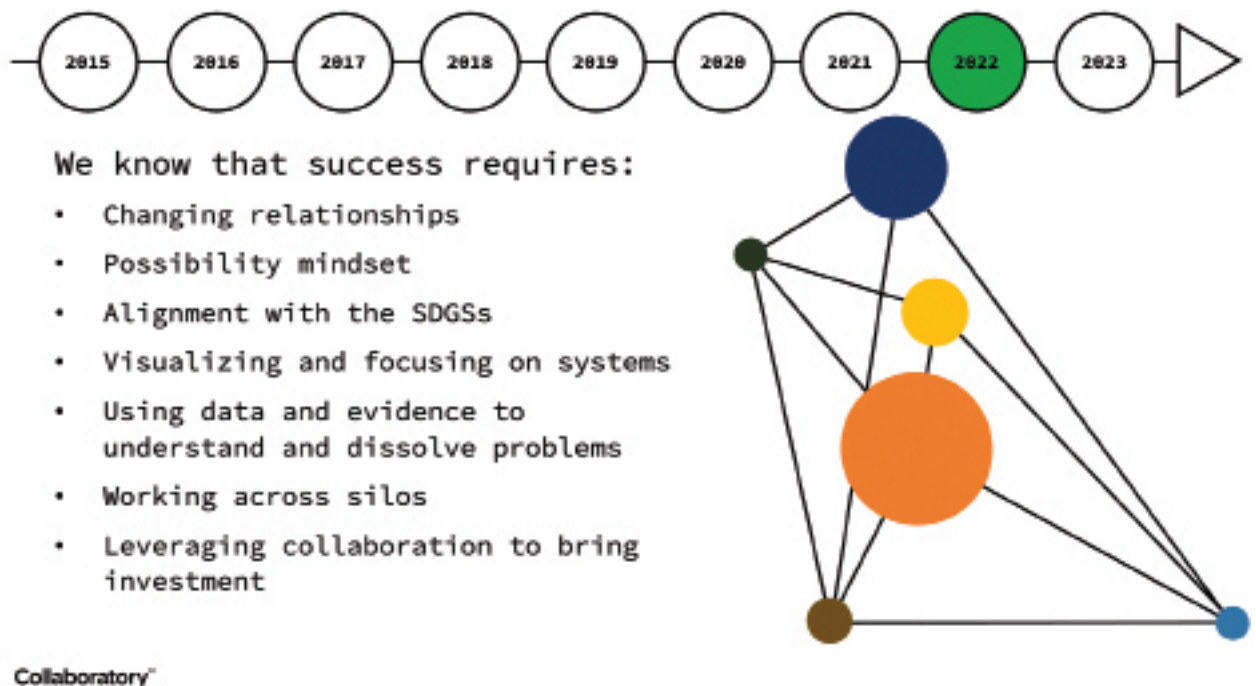
**3 Although community foundations are uniquely positioned to partner across countries, more learning is required to find ways to do that effectively.**

At Connecting Communities in the Americas, we envision a world in which communities and the community foundations that support them are collaborating across nations and regions. We will continue to support our participants in finding nuanced ways to build relationships, achieve common goals and strengthen local impact while they address issues that cross borders.

**“Making a difference at the local level is proportional to the amount of listening you do. Listening = Building Trust.”**

EVALUATION PARTICIPANT

At a convening in Mexico, Collaboratory shared their internal reflection with the rest of the participants:



It is our hope that this report will inspire and encourage community foundations across the Americas to connect in meaningful ways with their immigrant and diaspora communities and to find

ways to collaborate across countries to strengthen their learning and local impact.

**Why should place-based community foundations be concerned with migration? People in movement are simply part of our communities and need to belong. Así de fácil.**

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**So, the image that came to me is that it's like blowing on embers, you know, it's like there's a small ember and you blow on it and the flame arises.**

**I believe that this where the profound systemic changes that we need in the world begin.”**

EVALUATION PARTICIPANT





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