

CONNECTING
COMMUNITIES
IN THE AMERICAS



CONECTANDO
COMUNIDADES
EN AMÉRICA

2023 Learning Exchanges

CCA's mission is to inspire and strengthen community foundations and partners as they address issues that transcend borders.



FUNDACIÓN
COMUNITARIA
OAXACA



Instituto
Baixada



Tabôa
Fortalecimento Comunitário



INSTITUTO CACIMBA



FUNDACIÓN
PUNTA DE MITA



Fondo Comunitario Monteverde
Invirtiendo en el Desarrollo Comunitario Sostenible



St. Croix Foundation
for Community Development



Black Belt Community Foundation
Taking What We Have To Make What We Need



Foundation for
Appalachian
Kentucky



West Central
Initiative



THE
WINNIPEG
FOUNDATION

Background

Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA) is an initiative at CFLeads with the mission of inspiring and strengthening community foundations and partners for local impact as they address issues that transcend borders. The network has had representation from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico and the United States, including the Virgin Islands.

In late 2022, Connecting Communities offered the first round of microgrants for five Learning Exchange projects, with the hope that facilitating travel would open possibilities for paired organizations to build deeper relationships and strengthen their own work locally through shared learning.

CCA sent out a call for projects in August of 2022 and offered online information sessions in English, Portuguese and Spanish. Foundations were encouraged to find partners across countries and identify learning goals, which they presented together in their proposals. The Project Director collected the proposals, translated them and presented them to the CCA Steering Committee based on priorities that had previously been rated by a CCA Advisory Committee. We were able to award \$20,000 U.S. dollars among five projects, which were carried out in the first half of 2023.

With the intention of building relationships within the grantee cohort, participants met virtually at the beginning and end of the grant period to share about their respective contexts and experiences.

We also asked each group to send a brief report about their experiences with learning from the exchanges that we could then share with the larger CCA network. Their responses are arranged below under these headings:

- A. Reflections on Internal Processes
- B. Comparing Program Development
- C. The Value of Learning Exchanges

We hope that this summary and their individual reports on the CFLeads website will be inspirational to you in seeking out colleagues from other organizations and across countries for shared learning. Even if in-person visits are not possible, we have realized that technology has enabled connections that a few years ago we could not fully imagine – we would be remiss not to use every opportunity to deepen relationships and learning with colleagues across borders.

Participating foundations in 2023:

- Instituto Baixada, Brazil*
- Instituto Cacimba, Brazil*
- Fundación Punta de Mita, Mexico*
- The Winnipeg Foundation, Canada*
- West Central Initiative Foundation, USA*
- Black Belt Community Foundation, USA*
- Fundación Comunitaria Oaxaca, Mexico*
- Foundation for Appalachia Kentucky, USA*
- Tabôa Fortalecimento Comunitário, Brazil*
- Fondo Comunitario Monteverde, Costa Rica*
- St. Croix Foundation for Community Development*

By the numbers

5 Exchanges	6 Countries / territories
11 Community foundations	71 Participating staff and Board members



A. Reflections on Internal Structures

All the partnering organizations focused time on learning about each other's internal policies, procedures and strategic planning. In one case, two organizations had staff members pair up for zoom calls in the months leading up to their travel and according to their area of work (administration, programs, communications, governance). In most cases, part of the exchanges included sharing about internal operations and policies.

Topics of discussion included:

- Governance structures
- Communications
- Fundraising
- Fiscal sponsorship of local initiatives
- Trust-based philanthropy
- Advocacy
- Financial structures
- Grantmaking
- Equity and inclusion
- Partnerships with the public and private sectors



Monteverde is a community with a solid social fabric as it highlights the collaboration of the public, private and civil society sectors to achieve goals for the benefit of everyone, and we see the Fondo Comunitario Monteverde as a key agent in leading this collaboration.

B. Comparing Program Development



Fundación Punta de Mita identifies the role of tourism in the community from different perspectives - as an impulse to promote responsible tourism, its relevance in the impact on the demand for public services and urban development, and the need to promote other economic initiatives that reduce dependence solely on tourism.

The hands-on learning about various programs that each foundation supports was especially meaningful for participants. In all five cases, the teams set aside time for site visits in the respective communities, leading to a much deeper and richer understanding of the local contexts.

As an example, both Fondo Comunitario Monteverde in Costa Rica and Fundación Punta de Mita in western Mexico are located in areas dependent on tourism and have developed programs to support local family economic activities in addition to supporting local organizations. They talked about promoting a more environmentally friendly circular economy in their regions and promoting responsible tourism.

In the partnership between Fundación Comunitaria Oaxaca in Mexico and Instituto Baixada in Brazil, they shared learning about their

youth programs, with the common goal of giving visibility to how youth get involved in developing a vision for their communities and become leading agents in change.

For us it was very inspiring to see a room full of young men and women who listened attentively to the way we work; but it filled us with even more encouragement to see their faces when something we said made sense to them.



At Tabôa Fortalecimento Comunitário and Instituto Cacimba in Brazil, they exchanged ideas about how they supported individuals and families through micro-credits and capacity building in gastronomy, business skills and other topics.

[We appreciated] the rich opportunity to learn about the projects supported by Tabôa...based on dialogue, transparency in agreements and trust in the residents of the territory, strengthened the work that Cacimba has begun to develop.



Meanwhile, the St. Croix Foundation for Community Development, the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky and the Black Belt Community Foundation shared strategies around disaster recovery in their regions and mitigation, opportunities and challenges in leveraging federal recovery resources for more holistic community development.



In the Midwest region of Canada and the United States, The Winnipeg Foundation and West Central Initiative compared their rural community programs, grantmaking for environmental sustainability, and incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals into programming.



We were interested to learn how significantly WCI is engaging with rural communities, including their work in community planning. Our Endow Manitoba team works with rural community foundations and is interested in applying some of these approaches to our work.

C. The Value of Learning Exchanges

The Learning Exchange program is about more than just visiting a fellow community foundation – one of the key objectives was to plant seeds for longer-term collaboration between community foundations and across borders.

In some cases, such as with St. Croix–Appalachian Kentucky–Black Belt, and Oaxaca–Baixada, their collaboration had already been underway in some way and the opportunity to travel helped to deepen relationships and imagine new ways to work together.



All of the participants placed a high level of value on the opportunity to travel as a part of the Learning Exchanges.

The values acquired with and from this exchange are intangible. They include knowledge, respect, admiration, pride in the projects they support, in their actions, and in the public they serve. We were also able to appreciate the importance of civil society in guaranteeing rights and a more equitable society.

They appreciated the opportunity to visit each other’s foundation in person, including site visits to local projects and nonprofits. Learning first-hand from each other helped to widen perspectives about what is possible in their own contexts. Participants also said that the exchanges inspired them to continue with their own work, feeling that they are not alone and that they belong to a larger movement.

We also became more aware of the role of civil society in supporting populations in situations of vulnerability, guaranteeing rights and exercising citizenship.

There were certainly limitations and even some barriers to the Learning Exchanges. In one case, a visit was cancelled because the request for the travel visa was denied; in another, the visit had to be postponed due to weather conditions. With everyone’s busy schedules, it was challenging to find time for online calls and conversations, let alone plan a visit. High costs of transportation also limited travel, particularly in Brazil.

Despite these challenges, the feedback from this first cohort of CCA Learning Exchange grantees warrants continued support.



About Connecting Communities in the Americas

Together with community foundations and support organizations across the Americas, CCA provides opportunities for deepening dialogue about community philanthropy and promoting collaboration across borders, so that we can all better understand and serve our local communities. Together with our funders, sponsors and partners, CCA offers a number of opportunities, including:

- Monthly online Peer Resource Sharing program on various topics identified by our participants
- Learning documents about a wide spectrum of community philanthropy
- Grants to community foundations for mapping research on and engagement with local communities with lived experience in migration
- Grantee cohort peer learning opportunities

- In-person opportunities to share strategies and build relationships
- Learning Exchange mini-grants for peer-to-peer travel across borders
- Opportunities for active participants to be listed in the CCA Directory

Since 2016, more than 150 organizations have participated in CCA, including 80+ community foundations across 12 countries and territories. Although about a third of individual participants are in executive leadership, CCA is unique in catering to conversations between staff members across organizations and countries. We invest in interpretation services so that each participant can contribute and learn in their own language, which has dramatically strengthened both participation and a sense of belonging and recognition.

We hope that you will join us!



You can read more about Connecting Communities in the Americas on the CFLeads [web page](#). Please contact Lisa Schalla at lschalla@cfleads.org for any inquiries.