



ICF's Border Fund Strategy
March 2019

Founded in 1990, the [International Community Foundation \(ICF\)](#) is a nonprofit organization based in California, with the mission of facilitating and encouraging charitable giving from U.S. donors to international nonprofit organizations in Latin America, primarily Mexico and the San Diego-Tijuana border region. Through grants and strategic initiatives, ICF seeks to strengthen civil society and promote sustainable communities in the regions where we work.

Given our location in the San Diego-Tijuana border region, ICF has nearly 30 years of experience supporting vulnerable communities in Tijuana and throughout the Baja California peninsula. Therefore, we are uniquely positioned to understand and research regional issues, identify strategic partners, and quickly respond to situations as they arise, such as the 2014 influx of unaccompanied minors from Central America, the 2016 arrival of over 5,000 Haitian immigrants to Tijuana, larger numbers of repatriated Mexicans settling near the border, and the recent arrival of thousands of migrants seeking asylum through 'caravans'. In order to address these situations, the **ICF Border Fund was created to strengthen key organizations that work to create healthy, vibrant, inclusive communities in the California-Baja California region.**

Since early 2018, the [ICF Border Fund](#) has been dedicated to grassroots organizations responding to the basic needs of a growing population of vulnerable migrants and deportees in Tijuana, providing shelter, food, medicine, psychological support and legal services. These organizations consist primarily of local shelters, as well as organizations providing legal and health services, including, but not exclusively, Casa del Migrante Tijuana, Instituto Madre Asunta, Espacio Migrante, Departed Veterans Support House, Dreamers Moms/USA-Tijuana, and Friends of Friendship Park. All of these organizations have ongoing immediate needs and continue to be valued partners of ICF and our donors.

Recognizing that the most critical action a funder can take is to provide immediate general operating funding that allows organizations the flexibility to adapt as the situation evolves, **in 2019, the Border Fund will support local organizations or collaborations that have the objective of developing the long-term resilience of Tijuana to receive an ever-growing migrant population, through one or more of the following strategies.** The following priorities were decided based on extensive conversations and field research conducted in 2018 amongst local organizations and migrant populations. These strategies may shift in response to changing policies and conditions on-the-ground.

In 2019, ICF's Border Fund will benefit organizations whose mission or programs align with the following medium and long-term needs;

1. EDUCATION FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN & ADULTS

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is an essential tool for the protection of human dignity. When people are forced to flee from violence or persecution, or simply because they want to improve their socio-economic condition, their human rights are at- risk, particularly their access to education. However, receiving an education is one of the most effective ways for migrants and refugees to become full members of their host countries. 'Regularized' migrant workers and their children benefit intellectually and socially from attending school, where they learn about their new community and gain a semblance of normality in their lives. Meanwhile, as the period of time that asylum-seekers must wait in Tijuana to apply for asylum in the U.S. continues to increase, they need access to language courses and basic schooling, at the bare minimum.

Possible interventions to be supported by the Border Fund include:

- Adult and Youth Job Training and Workforce Development programs;
- Adult and Youth English language training, particularly for migrants seeking asylum in the United States;
- Formalized Education Programs for migrant Children & Youth.

2. ACCESS TO BASIC AND MENTAL HEALTH

A rapid increase of population movement has significant implications for both the migrants and their receiving communities, such as Tijuana and San Diego. This requires an adequate response from the public education and health sectors, to ensure that all people enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as established in the World Health organization's Constitution and international human rights standards and conventions. Nevertheless, many refugees, migrants and first-responders in Tijuana continue to lack access to health services, particularly trauma-informed mental health services.

Possible interventions to be supported by the Border Fund include:

- Mental health/psychological services for migrant adults, children, and first responders working directly with these populations (lawyers, staff at shelters, etc);
- Mobile Health Clinics and Medical Supplies for the network of shelters.

3. DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS: LEGAL SERVICES & ADVOCACY

According to the United Nations High Commissioner, "migrants in an irregular situation tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and marginalization, often

living and working in the shadows, afraid to complain, and denied their human rights and fundamental freedoms. (...) The denial of migrants' rights is often closely linked to discriminatory laws and to deep-seated attitudes of prejudice or xenophobia¹." In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ICF seeks to promote, protect and fulfill the human rights of all migrants, particularly the most vulnerable populations including indigenous populations, victims of trafficking or abuse, and those who identify as LGBTQI, for instance.

Possible interventions to be supported by the Border Fund include:

- Legal case work and Know Your Rights workshops;
- Advocacy and Collaboration with government agencies;
- Training Staff at shelters and other institutions about immigration/asylum laws.

4. STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY: CAPACITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Changes in the enforcement of U.S. immigration policy have always had an impact on the civil society organizations in border cities like Tijuana and San Diego. However, the recent large influx of deportees and 'caravans' have exposed the lack of permanent physical infrastructure in Tijuana, such as shelters, food, water, and medicine to meet the demand. Since 2016, most shelters remain at-capacity; many lack basic hygiene and clean water and struggle to provide basic food and medical treatment for their residents. Meanwhile, the institutional capacity of these organizations is also suffering to keep up with the ongoing needs. They need assistance identifying and securing new funding, increasing human capital to avoid burn out, and stronger program leadership. Investments in both capacity building and infrastructure will enable these organizations to be more effective and sustainable in the long-run, thus strengthening the resilience of the community/city of Tijuana to meet ongoing needs.

Possible interventions to be supported by the Border Fund include:

- **Institutional Capacity Building:**
 - Hiring a Local Coordinator for civil society;
 - Developing Institutional Policies (i.e. volunteer liability waivers, child-safeguarding policies, etc.);
 - Ongoing Training for staff;
 - Quarterly Convenings between local organizations to share experiences and challenges; discuss and present policy recommendations to government, etc.;
 - Fundraising and Communications support to diversify funding for long-term sustainability (i.e., FIN system, BBCA mapping survey).

- **Permanent Physical Infrastructure**
 - Establishing new Shelters or Resource Centers;
 - Upgrades at existing Shelters & Resource Centers.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/migration/pages/migrationandhumanrightsindex.aspx>.

5. CULTURAL INCLUSION & EQUITY

In response to the violence in their home communities, and in order to protect themselves during the dangerous trek to the US border, we have seen that migrants are increasingly seeking safety in numbers. Though ‘migrant caravans’ had been seen before, in October 2018, a caravan of 3,000-5,000 migrants departed Honduras, capturing international attention and inspiring further caravans to organize. These caravans have increased the visibility of migrants and their struggles, but also better-positioned migrants to denounce abuses. Unfortunately, the migrants’ collective mobility has also sparked a public backlash and exposed the growing stigmatization and criminalization of migrants and their defenders in both Mexico and the U.S. As proponents of cultural inclusion and equity throughout our work, ICF seeks to counter this divisive narrative and protect the human rights of all people in our border region.

Possible interventions to be supported by the Border Fund include:

- Research or initiatives with the objective of shifting the public discourse about migrants or any particular demographic, in both Mexico and the United States.
- Communications and advocacy support to educate the public and policy makers on the intersectional causes and impacts of migration policy, discourse, etc.
- Promote urban cultural life and acknowledge cultural diversity as a source of innovation, creativity and economic vitality.

BEYOND THE BORDER: CENTRAL AMERICA

As the flows of people continue, it is clear that efforts should also be made to understand and support strategies aiming to reduce the displacement and forced migration of Central Americans to the United States, which has led to many of the current challenges that we are facing in the San Diego-Tijuana border region. ICF has existing grants and programmatic partners in Central America, and we are well-positioned to advise and facilitate grants to local organizations in the region. As of early 2019, ICF is investing limited staff time for research about the bilateral development community’s regional strategies and local grassroots organizations who are working to reduce high levels of forced migration to the United States/border.

Our goal is to help our individual donors and the broader public better understand and respond to the needs of communities in Central America, in order to help reduce rates of forced migration, which will benefit both the people of Central America and the San Diego-Tijuana border community.

Contact: *If you are interested in learning more about this research and its objectives, please contact Program Officer, Eliza Brennan at eliza@icfdn.org.*