

Strengthening integration between California and Baja California



Working group's report explores how the region can emerge stronger and move forward together after COVID-19

Beginning in March 2020, the U.S.-Mexico border was partially closed for nearly 20 months due to health concerns arising from the novel coronavirus pandemic.

“The border shutdown revealed that in critical times, the mechanisms of coordination and dialogue between California and Baja California were less resilient than many regional leaders hoped,” said [Rafael Fernández de Castro](#), professor and director of the [Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies](#) at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS).

In response, the center and the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego convened a working group and organized a series of conversations seeking to understand how the state of emergency affected different aspects of the cross-border relationship and explore the steps that might be taken to strengthen the CaliBaja region, which comprises parts of Southern California in the U.S. and

Baja California in Mexico.

“Through this working group, we facilitated dialogues between regional leaders from the public, private and social sectors on key topics for strengthening CaliBaja’s integration such as governance, cross-border infrastructure, healthcare systems, integrated supply chains, migration, energy and many more,” Fernández de Castro said.

The working group, in collaboration with [Paul Ganster](#), director of the [Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias](#) at San Diego State University, is in the process of publishing a report containing 13 brief chapters with specific recommendations on how to strengthen CaliBaja’s integration.

In addition to providing specific policy recommendations, each chapter will analyze the pre-pandemic conditions for cooperation, what happened as a result of COVID-19 and the border shutdown, and what the aspirations of stakeholders in the region should be to reach an ideal state of transborder cooperation. The report, published with support from Sempra and Otay-Tijuana Venture, LLC, will be written for a non-academic audience on both sides of the border and will be available in both English and Spanish.

Participants in the series of conversations reached one clear consensus: many emergency situations do not respect national borders, and stakeholders in the region can no longer be reactive if they wish to be effective.

“Border communities must proactively organize and advocate for policy decisions that respond to their local needs,” Fernández de Castro said.

The working group’s ultimate goal, Fernández de Castro added, is to help build a region that is more resilient, equitable and sustainable.

“We are aware of the dynamic and complex relationship between Mexico and the United States,” said Ambassador Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez, consul general of Mexico in San Diego. “However, we are convinced that cross-border dialogue and networking are essential to assess the challenges and opportunities in this border region.”

The working group is currently evolving to its second stage for continued conversations with a new name that intends to highlight optimism and

collaboration - CaliBaja: Moving Forward Together. The group is composed of 43 people representing 25 national, state and local organizations from the public, private and social sectors. An additional group is selected for each meeting based on their expertise on the specific issues discussed.

For more information, visit the [CaliBaja Integration Working Group website](#).