



The Coppel - Intuit  
Center for Binational Institutions  
an initiative by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation



# CBI 2021

## U.S.-MEXICO BINATIONAL INSTITUTIONS REPORT

2022

## A THANK YOU NOTE FROM THE CBI PROGRAM LEADER

This report marks our first year of operations at the Coppel-Intuit "Center for Binational Institutions". Coincidentally, it covers a time frame during which the U.S.-Mexico relationship experienced the relaunching of several bilateral institutions.



In many ways, 2021 was also a challenging and defining year: the beginning of post-pandemic economic recovery in line with global value chain disruptions, the easing of policy responses to COVID-19, amid Omicron's variant surge; the increase in immigration flows to the United States; among many other topics. Nevertheless, in the complexity of the current binational climate, we have clearly seen the interests of both nations converge, and the important role that institutions have played.

Our work is centered precisely on contributing to a better understanding of the role that bilateral institutions play in helping the United States and Mexico address shared challenges and seize common opportunities.

We want to thank our sponsors, allies, contributing scholars from both the United States and Mexico, and the general public interested in binational affairs for taking part in CBI's programming, including our first Annual Seminar which took place back in September 2021.

With your support, we look forward to continuing growing our impact in the year ahead.

Cristina Martinez Pinto  
*Center for Binational Institutions*  
*Program Leader*

# INTRODUCTION

The Center for Binational Institutions (CBI) is an initiative by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation. Its mission is to promote a better understanding of institutions and the role these have in the bilateral agenda.

The CBI Annual U.S. - Mexico Binational Institutions Report will serve as a yearly analysis of the bilateral relationship through an institutional lens that focuses on four types of institutions: agreements, dialogue mechanisms, organizations and programs. It is not uncommon to hear from academics and practitioners alike that institutions are an important part of the bilateral relationship and as such, as the CBI began its work, it was important to develop a conceptual framework to define, map and study institutions.

Accordingly, the CBI will study agreements; this means the written documents that establish rules that govern the bilateral relationship, ranging from treaties, inter institutional or executive agreements, to joint statements or declarations. Over the years, a whole range of dialogue mechanisms have been established either by themselves or as part of a specific agreement, and they are both permanent or temporary. These mechanisms provide fora in which governments and society address the whole range of issues that the relationship involves. In some instances, specific programs have also been established. Finally, on a few notable occasions formal organizations with their own budget and staff have also been created to manage specific aspects of the bilateral relationship. All of these are the subject analysis of the CBI because it is important to map them, and understand how they have contributed or not to the bilateral relationship.

The CBI's first Annual Seminar on Bilateral Institutions took place last September and convened an extraordinary group of academics and practitioners from the United States and Mexico to discuss the role of institutions and also about developments throughout the last few years. The seminar proved to be a very valuable exercise to better understand binational institutions and gather ideas for the work that lies ahead for the CBI.

Completing the mission of the CBI is a multi-year effort. As such, this first edition of the CBI Annual Report should be seen as a point of departure for future analysis, and as an effort to capture what has occurred during 2021 in terms of binational institutions.



# 2021: RELAUNCHING OF KEY BILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

## YEAR'S MAIN EVENTS

### JANUARY

20th The Biden administration is inaugurated.

### APRIL

20th Esteban Moctezuma becomes Mexico's new Ambassador

### MAY

7th Vice President Harris' first virtual meeting with the Mexican President.

13th Officials meet for the first High Level Security Strategy Meeting.

19th First meeting of USMCA's Trade Commission

### JUNE

8th Vice President Harris' visits Mexico and meets President López Obrador.

15th U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas visits Mexico.

17th Tenth meeting of the U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Defense Working Group.

Beyond a number of diplomatic visits, working meetings and video calls between public officials both from Mexico and the United States at the highest levels (see Timeline at the left for reference), 2021 was a key year to set a new tone in the working relationship between Presidents Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Joe Biden, as well as to revamp existing collaboration mechanisms at an institutional level.

### Relaunching of the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED)

#### Institutional context

The HLED provides a strategic, measurable, and goal-oriented platform for the United States and Mexico to advance economic and social priorities central to fostering regional prosperity, expanding job creation, promoting investment, and reducing inequality and poverty.

#### U.S.-Mexico HLED

On September 9th, 2021, the U.S. - Mexico HLED cabinet-level annual meeting was relaunched to deliver on the commitment made by Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and American President, Joe Biden. The meeting took place in Washington D.C.; participants discussed the four pillars of the HELD's joint vision: building back together; promoting sustainable economic and social development in Southern Mexico and Central America; securing the tools for future prosperity; and investing in our people.

U.S. delegation: Vice President Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai, and U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas and USAID Administrator Samantha Power were also in attendance.

Mexican delegation: Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard, Secretary of Economy Tatiana Clouthier, Mexican Ambassador to the United States Esteban Moctezuma, and Undersecretary of Finance and Public Credit Gabriel Yorio.

### Enabling the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue

#### Institutional context

In 2007, Mexico and the United States partnered under the Merida Initiative to combat criminal organizations. In 2016, both nations shared security results and agreed on new border strategies. In 2017, Luis Videgaray, Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Affairs, met with the Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, and they agreed on having frequent meetings throughout the year. In 2018, the meeting of the 21st Century Border Technical Working Group was held between officials from both countries, where security issues were discussed. In 2019, a bilateral meeting on security was held. At the beginning of 2020, Presidents López

## JULY



5th -Mexico's President meets with U.S. Senators to discuss immigration

Obrador and Trump met to discuss health and safety issues. In May 2021, a New Security Strategy Meeting was the first dialogue on security issues since President Biden took office. During that meeting, it was not specified whether the Merida Initiative would be reformed or under what scheme the binational security efforts will take place.

7th Mexican, American and Canadian Trade Ministers met in Mexico City to commemorate the first year anniversary of the USMCA.

### U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue

On October 8th, 2021 the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue took place between Mexico and the United States among officials from both nations. With this meeting began a new era in security cooperation through the U.S. - Mexico Bicentennial Framework. This new framework establishes a comprehensive and long-term approach to guide bilateral actions going forward, in order to build a system of peace, justice and respect for the rule of law.

19th-23rd Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Ian G. Brownlee, visits Mexico.

In support of the development of the goals of the U.S. - Mexico Bicentennial Framework, both nations commit to take additional concrete actions to strengthen cooperation in security, which include: signing a Memorandum of Understanding to reduce drug addiction and associated harms; creating the Network for the Prevention of Homicide to provide a platform for the exchange of best practices in crime and violence prevention; coordinating arms detection and seizure activities, considering new strategies and strengthening collective efforts; expanding binational cooperation against illegal trafficking and human trafficking by transnational criminal organizations; prosecuting criminal networks; targeting chemical precursor importers and their financial networks; and increasing forensic cooperation efforts to help resolve the thousands of cases of disappearances in Mexico, for the benefit of the families of the victims and against impunity.

## AUGUST

9th Call between Mexican President and Vice President Harris.

### The return of the North American Leaders Summit (NALS)

#### Institutional context

The North American Leaders' Summit (NALS) is a trilateral summit between the Mexican and American Presidents, and the Canadian Prime Minister. Initially, the Summit was part of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), a continent level dialogue established in 2005. During the Trump administration from 2017 to 2021, no official summits were held. The North American Leaders' Summit was celebrated this year after a five-year pause.

10th Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs meets U.S. delegation led by the National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan and the Secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas.

### North American Leaders Summit (NALS)

17th -Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs confirms that the HLED will take place on September 9th.

## SEPTEMBER

9th The U.S. - Mexico HLED annual meeting was relaunched.

President Joe Biden received Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, at the White House on November 18th, 2021.



## OCTOBER

- 8th The U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Meeting takes place.
- 12th Mexican Treasury Secretary Ramírez de la O meets with the Secretaries of National Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, and of the Treasury, Janet Yellen.
- 28th Mexico and the United States celebrated the binational Consular Dialogue.

It was a diplomatic event in which the three leaders tried to project a united front amid trade disputes and concerns about increased migration at the U.S.-Mexico border. Through this event, the U.S. and the Mexican Presidents met in person for the first time. Several topics were mentioned during the meeting, some of which are economic cooperation, the COVID-19 pandemic, migration, development and security. As well as the relaunching of the High Level Economic Dialogue, in September of 2021, as a tool for cooperation moving forward. The U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities, launched in October, was also part of the conversation. Both presidents pledged to create working groups on arms trafficking and related trans-border crime and border security, and to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding for joint cooperation on mental health, substance use and addictions.

## NOVEMBER

- 8th Crossings for non-essential travel resumes in the U.S. - Mexico border.
- 18th President Biden hosts Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico for the North America Leaders' Summit.

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The events described above are examples of mechanisms that were revised, relaunched and which provide frameworks for bilateral functionalities to carry out their work, as well as to measure progress and results. Throughout 2022, we expect to see a continued revision of the bilateral agenda throughout the aforementioned frameworks of collaboration.

## DECEMBER

- 3rd Mexico and the United States sign an MOU for Sembrando Oportunidades.
- 3rd XIII Plenary Meeting of the US-Mexico Bilateral Executive Committee for Border Management in the 21st Century.
- 13th Mexico and the United States present HLED work plan.
- 14th Mexico and the United States set the Bicentennial Framework in motion.

# YEAR SCORECARD

In upcoming Annual Reports, we aim to develop a robust scorecard that allows us to build indicators that are relevant to measure advancements in terms of the institutional bilateral relationship. As our first edition, we present a list with the number of presidential meetings between Mexico and the United States that have occurred since 1988 until 2021. This information was recently presented by the CBI in the form of an infographic in Forbes Magazine (Spanish version).

Presidential meetings throughout the years: an institutionalized relationship

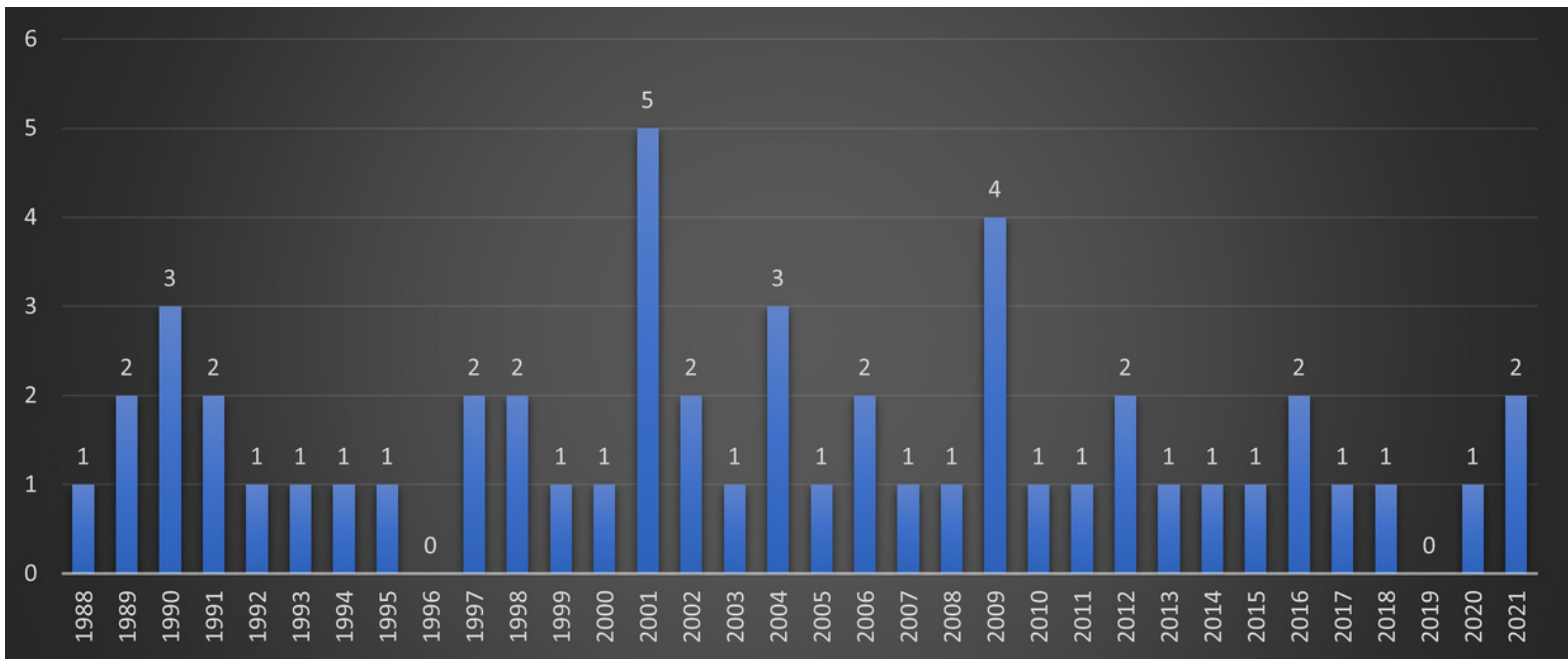
Understanding that the relationship between Mexico and the United States is complex and dynamic, and despite moments of tension and multiple challenges faced along the way, mutual interests have prevailed and have laid the foundations for binational collaboration. For instance, institutions have played a key role in structuring this relationship and resolving conflicts.

The graph below presents the sum of presidential meetings and key events that occurred in recent decades, which represent the foundations on which binational institutions have been consolidated. Through the years, changes in administrations, and political agendas, Mexican and U.S. presidents continue to meet and build around issues of binational interest. It is worth mentioning that even during the presidency of Donald Trump, where presidential meetings were not held on a regular basis, other institutional mechanisms of collaboration continued their course. For example, the National Conference of Governors in 2017.

Likewise, despite the fact that 2021 was a challenging year in terms of the post-pandemic context, important commitments were achieved under the relaunch of the High-Level Economic Dialogue and the launch of the Bicentennial Framework on Security, Public Health, and Communities between Mexico and the United States.

As already mentioned in the previous sections, in November 18, 2021 the presidents of the United States and Mexico, Joe Biden and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, along with the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, held their first face-to-face meeting in Washington, DC. This meeting was the first in which all three countries have participated at the highest level in five years.

# PRESIDENTIAL MEETINGS



Graph 1. Number of Presidential Meetings by year (Own creation)

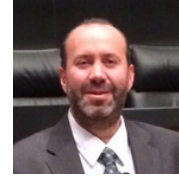
The number of Presidential meetings provides evidence of a historic relationship built on the premises of dialogue and cooperation, and we use it as a proxy to measure the extent on which both countries have advanced their national interests through a bilateral agenda. Throughout the years, the Presidential meetings have enabled the creation of a number of institutions in the form of agreements, programs, dialogue mechanisms, and organizations, which are the focus of our work at the Center for Binational Institutions and which also have shaped our current context.

Mexican Presidents	American Presidents
Salinas (1988-1994) Zedillo (1994-2000) Fox (2000-2006) Calderon (2006-2012) Peña Nieto (2012-2018) López Obrador (2018-)	Bush (1989-1993) Clinton (1993-2001) W. Bush (2001-2009) Obama (2009-2017) Trump (2017-2021) Biden (2021-)

Table 1. U.S. and Mexican Presidents (1988-2021)



# A YEAR IN REVIEW BY U.S.-MEXICO EXPERTS



Dr. Jorge A.  
Schiavon  
*Research Professor*  
CIDE

The complex “intermestic” relationship between Mexico and the United States requires a solid institutional infrastructure for its efficient and effective administration, especially with the deterioration of national and binational institutions that took place during the first two years of the Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the Donald Trump administrations. Academics like to define the relationship between the two countries as “intermestic”, because what happens in the domestic realm inside Mexico and the United States has an international impact, particularly in the bilateral sphere. In this intermestic relationship, more and better binational institutions benefit both countries —especially Mexico, since it is the less powerful partner in the relation—, by providing more predictability, certainty, efficiency, and effectiveness to identify and attend the multiple issue areas and topics that integrate the bilateral agenda.

For this reason, we must celebrate the creation of the Center for Binational Institutions (CBI), an initiative by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation, because, through its work, we will be able to better understand the binational institutions that exist to manage the bilateral relationship, as well as their impact on the common agenda. To analyze the characteristics and effects of these institutions, the CBI started doing the seminal work of developing a conceptual framework that defines and maps the most relevant binational institutions.

Then, based on this framework, the Binational Institutions Annual Report (BIAR) will provide a yearly evaluation of the bilateral relationship. This 2021 BIAR analyzes the U.S.-Mexico relations through an institutional lens that emphasizes four types of institutions (agreements, dialogue mechanisms, organizations, and programs) to capture the most relevant moments of the relationship, explaining the impact of these four types of institutions on the negotiation, definition, and implementation of the binational agenda.

This report also mentions the CBI’s first Annual Seminar on Bilateral Institutions (ASBI), where a group of experts from both countries, including academics, practitioners, and diplomats, shared their knowledge on the role of institutions and their relevance for a better and more professional administration of the bilateral relationship. The structure of this report reflects these discussions on what the CBI should concentrate on doing in the future, how this can be achieved, and why it is relevant for a better understanding of the U.S.-Mexico relationship. As this report correctly argues, 2021 has been a key year to establish a new working relationship between Mexico and the United States, revamping existing bilateral institutions and creating new ones.

In sum, thanks to the CBI, we will now have an annual diagnosis of the U.S.-Mexico relationship, evaluating its current reality through the situation, actions, and activities of its binational institutions. This 2021 edition of the report is only the point of departure of the future analysis that will be conducted by the CBI every year. We should welcome and congratulate the CBI and the U.S.-Mexico Foundation for this extremely relevant and important initiative, that will allow both countries to have a better understanding of each other, and therefore, generate and facilitate more and better cooperation.

# A YEAR IN REVIEW BY U.S.-MEXICO EXPERTS



Ryan C. Berg, PhD  
*Senior Fellow-Americas  
Program CSIS*

U.S.-Mexico binational institutions are a critical part of the bilateral relationship because they not only institutionalize it, but thereby insulate the bilateral relationship from the personal chemistry (or lack thereof) between political leaders. 2021 was a good year for the U.S.-Mexico relationship in terms of binational institutions. To be more specific, it was a year of potential course correction. By (re)initiating several binational institutions, both sides likely arrested a further slide toward potential decoupling on various topics of mutual concern. Specifically, the U.S. and Mexico relaunched the High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED) with a joint vision encompassing four principal pillars; the North American Leaders Summit (NALS), at which Presidents López Obrador and Biden met in-person for the first time; and the newly-agreed framework for security cooperation.

To build on this momentum, 2022 will be critical. The substance and performance of these institutions, rather than their reconstitution, will be what matters going forward.

Take security cooperation, for instance. The U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities—Bicentennial Framework for short—establishes a space for discussing common security challenges posed by transnational criminal organizations, cross-border weapons trafficking, and drug smuggling. The Bicentennial Framework reconstitutes a long-running dialogue on security matters between the two countries that had been placed in a deep freeze following the arrest on corruption charges of General Salvador Cienfuegos while on vacation in Los Angeles. AMLO famously campaigned on a security policy of “hugs, not bullets,” leading to tensions in the bilateral security relationship owing to a U.S. preference for stronger action and greater interdiction efforts. The arrest of Cienfuegos—apparently without warning to Mexican authorities—was a step too far and the proximate cause of the Bicentennial Framework’s predecessor agreement, the Mérida Initiative, which had been operative since 2008.

Much like Mérida, the Bicentennial Framework endorses the foundational idea that security challenges stem from a sense of “shared responsibility” for the border and what happens on both sides of it. The agreement is short on novel ideas for tackling rather intractable security challenges; rather, the Bicentennial

Framework appears to be a rebranded version of the Mérida Initiative. AMLO had long contended that the Mérida Initiative placed too much emphasis on interdiction and the transfer of weapons and equipment (never mind that these transfers ceased in 2012). What was neglected, according to the López Obrador administration, was the fourth pillar of the Initiative—human and economic development. The Bicentennial Framework, therefore, reflects a course correction in the view of AMLO.

Gone are the Mérida Initiative’s four guiding pillars. In a reordering of priorities, the Bicentennial Framework espouses three principal goals: protect our people, prevent transborder crime, and pursue criminal networks. That “protect our people” is listed first—the functional equivalent to Mérida’s fourth pillar—while efforts to dismantle criminal groups appear last is a major reversal. Remarks from Mexican officials involved in the Bicentennial Framework negotiations emphasize the word “unprecedented” to describe it, but what appears to have happened is a reshuffling of Mérida’s operative pillars.

Tensions within the security relationship following the Cienfuegos arrest, subsequent extradition, and dropping of charges—refusal to grant DEA agents visas, a so-called “foreign agent’s law” limiting intelligence collecting and sharing —threatened the quality of U.S.-Mexico security cooperation at an important moment. Criminal organizations continue to spread their tentacles and operate seamlessly across our shared border; gun runners are helping criminal groups to amass arsenals rivaling the state’s; 100,000 Americans died of overdose deaths in 2021; and, record numbers of Mexicans have died in past years in rising violence. To borrow a phrase from President Biden—now more than ever, it is important to show that security cooperation through newly-reconstituted binational institutions can work.

## FINAL REMARKS FROM AMB. GERÓNIMO GUTIÉRREZ, SENIOR CBI FELLOW

The Center for Bilateral Institutions is guided by the notion that institutions are important because they help both countries and specially their governments address and often solve specific problems, and they also facilitate follow-up, which is often key to assure that joint initiatives are indeed implemented. By no means are institutions a guarantee that the relationship will evolve positively or without conflict, especially if the



countries' leaders do not share a common vision about the relationship and the future, but they do provide the opportunity to tackle differences through some basic institutional and organized framework.

This past year was reinvigorating in many ways for the relationship between Mexico and the United States in general, and for bilateral institutions in particular. In the COVID context, virtual meetings between president Lopez Obrador and President Biden and also with Vice president Harris help jumpstart an ambitious bilateral agenda in the relation's main fronts: trade, security, and migration.

During the year, the first meeting of the United States, Mexico and Canada Agreement's Trade Commission was held as the agreement continued with its implementation process, bilateral trade retook an upward trend, and Mexico reaffirmed itself as the United States main trading partner. In this same vein, with good work from both sides, the High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED) was re-established and is now up and running with a specific action program. Similarly, security and law enforcement agencies met to start a new cooperation framework through the Bicentennial Understanding, which has substituted the Merida Initiative. Addressing the migration phenomenon, both at regional and binational levels, remains a top priority for both governments and in this sense, this year we saw a series of high-level meetings prompting cooperation at different levels. These are all welcomed developments in the bilateral relationship.

Through its work this year, the CBI began the process of identifying, mapping, and analyzing bilateral institutions. The Center's first Annual Seminar was a very rich exercise among academics and practitioners, that not only confirmed the important role played by institutions in building a better relationship, but also helped refine the conceptual framework on which the CBI can base its research. A special mention deserves the research carried out by Professor Guillermo Garcia Sanchez on executive agreements between government entities from Mexico and the United States which was shared among the seminar's audience and helps us understand more about the bilateral institutional architecture. Clearly, much work remains to be done, especially considering the robust subnational diplomacy that is carried out on a regular basis by state and local officials from both countries. Similarly, the way in which legislators from the United States and Mexico have interacted through the Inter Parliamentary Meeting since 1961 remains very much an understudied area of the bilateral relationship. As the CBI continues its work during 2022, these are important topics that must be further researched and analyzed.

# THE INSTITUTIONAL QUOTES PROJECT

Through the collection of quotes from experts on binational institutions, we aim to promote a better understanding of binational institutions and its role in the Mexico - United States relationship. Participants are asked to provide us with a personal quote describing what binational institutions are for them. Based on this data, we will create a booklet presenting an analysis of recurrent topics and recommendations. Below a few examples:

“By providing frameworks and a set of rules for collaboration, binational institutions enable trust. Trust is key to create and advance a vision of shared prosperity. The Center for Binational Institutions was created under this principle.

Cristina Martínez Pinto, Center for Binational Institutions Program Leader

“When the leaders of both countries have a shared vision, bilateral institutions help materialize it. When they don't, they help process the differences and provide stability.”

Gerónimo Gutiérrez, Center for Binational Institutions Senior Fellow

“Binational institutions are in place with consequential agreements, like the USMCA. However, this is like a game of soccer - the lines are drawn, goals are placed, rules are known, and players are ready. As players, the ball is on our court. What game should we play? One that upholds, respects, and strengthens institutions in order to foment an environment in which a consolidated North America can become the most competitive region in the world”.

Victor André Gamas Mayer, Nexus Global Ventures Founder & CEO

“No bilateral relationship has a greater impact on the daily lives of its citizens than does the US-Mexico relationship. Our countries share social, cultural, historical, and economic ties that are both institutional and personal. Bilateral institutions, at federal, state, and local levels, shelter the relationship from political winds that might otherwise send it into the rocks of uncertainty and animous.”

Andrew I. Rudman, Mexico Institute Director

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Intuit is an American company that specializes in financial software. This company seeks to attract the best global talent, add partners to its global platform and create exceptional corporate citizenship. Intuit's mission is to drive prosperity around the world through job creation. Intuit seeks to achieve its mission by investing in people, strengthening communities, and offering everyone the opportunity to prosper.



The U.S. - Mexico Foundation is a binational nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering bilateral cooperation and understanding between the United States and Mexico. The organization began its operations in 2009 with seed funds from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and the Business Foundation in Mexico (Fundemex). Its vision is to be an effective bridge for greater understanding and binational cooperation and contributing to a better quality of life and social equity in Mexico. The U.S. - Mexico Foundation carries out its mission in two ways: by operating programs and promoting a constructive dialogue on key issues of binational interest.