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• What is the research problem to be addressed and the aim of the research?:

In recent decades private and public funders, most notably US foundations (Ford, Kellogg, Mott) and aid agencies (USAID, Inter-American Foundation), have invested millions of dollars to promote the creation of donor institutions in developing countries. The export of the community foundation and United Way models have had mixed success and have undergone serious rethinking and revisions. One key aspect of this re-thinking has been an examination of the cultural and institutional context in which philanthropic behavior occurs. The aim of this research is to identify and examine the values and habits underlying philanthropic behavior in Mexico, and thereby offer an important comparative perspective.

• What is the research question?: In recent years and drawing on empirical research largely in the United States, social scientists have demonstrated an important and positive relationship between social capital and philanthropic behavior, particularly volunteerism and donations (Putnam 2000, Brown and Ferris 2007). The question underlying this paper is, how robust is our existing explanation of philanthropic behavior based on research in developed nations when applied to developing countries? More specifically, what is the relationship between social capital and philanthropic behavior in Mexico? It what ways is it similar or different from research in other nations, especially the US, where this research agenda is most advanced. Despite critical differences between the two nations, this comparison is critical for the intimate relationship between these “distant neighbors” and the important flow of philanthropic resources between them – both financial and conceptual.

• What theories and concepts inform the research?:

The major concept that informs the research is that of social capital, which includes both participation in social networks as well as norms of reciprocity and trust. This concept has been incorporated into research on philanthropic behavior and presents another explanatory factor, along with education, income and religiosity. Prior research by the authors has uncovered the importance of informal or non-institutional manifestations of altruism in Mexico, and the current paper will examine how social capital relates to a preference for institutional versus non-institutional giving.

• What is the research methodology and design?:

This research is based upon a national public opinion survey conducted in 2005 and 2008, and a special sample of the 2008 survey done in the city of Chihuahua. The national survey is based upon a random sample of 1,500 respondents at the national level and 400 in Chihuahua. The interviews were conducted face-to-face rather than via telephone, which insures the inclusion of poorer households and heightens the representativeness of the results. For the purposes of this paper the authors will conduct a statistical analysis of the data bases, offering comparisons between the 2005 and 2008 results as well as the national and local results. This latter comparison is especially important, as the city of Chihuahua was suffered the greatest impact of the current economic and financial crisis as well as the social crisis of public insecurity, with levels of violence not seen since the Mexican Revolution.
What are the key theoretical and/or empirical findings?

The authors have not yet conducted the statistical analysis of the relationship between the variables of social capital and philanthropic behavior (volunteer work and donations). The results of the first phase of analysis, which has focused more on expiring each individual variable rather than their interrelationship. What the authors have uncovered is that prevalence of informality in Mexican philanthropy and the influence of distrust in discouraging altruism. In the current work the authors will use the survey results to understand the challenges and opportunities for encouraging philanthropy, and volunteerism, especially in terms of impact of low levels of social capital and the crises in terms of the economy and public safety.