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Woody & Gayle Hunt Family Foundation Expands Investment in Leadership Fellowship Powering the Future of the Borderplex

Multi-year investment with Aspen Conexión will expand scholarships for emerging leaders across one of North America's largest binational economies, spanning El Paso, Texas; Las Cruces, New Mexico; and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 29, 2026 — The Aspen Institute's **Aspen Conexión** program today announced a four-year investment from the Woody & Gayle Hunt Family Foundation to expand the **Hunt-Aspen Fellowship**, increasing scholarship opportunities for Borderplex leaders to participate in Aspen Institute leadership programs while elevating the region's perspective in national conversations.

Since 2020, **more than 100 fellows** have gone on to launch new initiatives, secure major grants, and serve in leadership positions across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors throughout the Borderplex. Now in its sixth year, this new investment will expand the annual cohort, enabling more participants to take part in the Fellowship and further strengthening the region's pipeline of leaders committed to its long-term success.

While each Fellow's journey is unique, the impact extends well beyond the individual. As Fellows widen their circle of influence, they leave each Aspen experience with an expanded global network and a renewed commitment to values-based leadership that strengthens the communities they serve:

- [Hunt-Aspen alumna Alexandra Chavez](#), Market Executive at Bank of America in El Paso, credits the Fellowship with broadening her perspective on leadership and reinforcing her commitment to creating economic opportunity across the Borderplex. What began with teaching financial literacy classes evolved into her current leadership role, where she now helps elevate the region's economic potential within Bank of America while opening pathways for others to achieve financial stability.
- [Dr. Ramon Benavides](#), Assistant Principal at Ysleta Independent School District, has translated the Fellowship experience into tangible results for both his career

and his students. Since completing the program, he has been appointed a U.S. Department of Defense STEM Ambassador and helped expand STEM opportunities for students across his district.

- Fellowship alumni Drs. Alyssa Benavides and Christiane Herber-Valdez transformed ideas developed through the Fellowship into action by launching [*Borderland Dental Leaders: Building Bridges*](#), an initiative that received a \$400,000 grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to strengthen the region's oral health workforce.
- [Arturo Barrio](#), another Fellowship alum, was recently appointed Vice President and Regional Executive for El Paso at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, bringing the perspective of the Borderplex to one of the nation's leading economic institutions.

"Year after year, we watch Hunt-Aspen Fellows become some of the strongest ambassadors for the Borderplex," said **Pilar Frank-O'Leary, Executive Director of Aspen Conexión**. "They bring the perspective of the region into conversations with leaders from across the country and around the world. Fellows return with fresh ways of thinking, relationships they never expected to build, and a renewed sense of purpose. That experience doesn't end at Aspen—it has a ripple effect that makes communities stronger."

"Investing in leadership is one of the best investments we can make in the future of the Borderplex," said **Woody L. Hunt**, Chairman of the Woody & Gayle Hunt Family Foundation. "Through our partnership with the Aspen Institute, we've seen how this fellowship helps talented leaders broaden their perspectives, strengthen their networks, and return home with new ideas that benefit our entire region. We're proud to expand this opportunity so more leaders can help move the Borderplex forward."

This gift advances a long-term partnership between the Aspen Institute and the Hunt Family Foundation. The investment is a testament to the power of place-based leadership strategy—recognizing that strong communities require strong leaders, and that the Borderplex is a region whose voice deserves to resonate at every table.

For more information about the Hunt-Aspen Fellowship and Aspen Conexión, [click here](#).