As we approach the beginning of our last week here in Nogales, I have had time to reflect on my experiences, as well as the expectations I carried into the internship. Being able to experience the diversity of Nogales, as well as other border communities, has broadened my perspective as to what being a part of the borderlands means. Prior to the start of the program, I had preconceived notions regarding what life here was like, most of which were centered around immigration policy and the effects that they had on the community and migrants. But throughout the course of these last five weeks, I have learned that, although immigration heavily influences life in the borderlands, many of these communities, particularly “Ambos” Nogales, are multifaceted, especially when it comes to advocacy work and the economy.

This week, we visited the Mexican-American Heritage and History Museum in Tucson, AZ and were able to meet and chat with the co-director Alisha. She explained the culturally rich and diverse history of the Tucson area and its deep-rooted Mexican and Latine heritage, most evident in the older Tucsonense barrios. However, due to the ongoing gentrification of these neighborhoods, many businesses and families that have historically lived there have been displaced since they can no longer afford to live there. One of the current exhibits at the museum honors Alba Bustamante Torres, a long-time community activist who has been advocating for the preservation of these barrios and Tucsonense history and culture since the 1960s. She has also been involved with promoting immigrants’ rights throughout Southern Arizona. Alba, along with other community leaders and activists have organized and created a movement to fight back against new developments acquiring the older barrios and ensuring that the community’s voices
are heard. The work of all of these Tucsonense activists is the epitome of what advocacy and economic empowerment within a community looks like.

The following day, we met with the nonprofit organization ARSOBO in Nogales, Sonora. It is a bi-national organization whose mission is to provide assistance and medical devices to people with disabilities. Arizona Sonora Border Projects for Inclusion (ARSOBO) empowers people who use that same medical device to be involved in the creation of these lifesaving aids, lifting barriers. By training and employing people who use the medical devices they build for others, ARSOBO is creating access to employment for people who have otherwise not had the opportunity. Wheelchairs, limb prosthetics, hearing aids, as well as physical therapy are essential services given to those who are unable to afford them. We spoke with Francisco “Kiko” Trujillo, the executive director and co-founder of ARSOBO, and he discussed how while their funds may at times be limited, they never refuse a service to someone who is truly in need and cannot afford to pay. ARSOBO, and other similar organizations, bridge the gap between service providers and the community they care for, making for a more inclusive and diverse environment.

After having met with various organizations and community leaders in both Tucson and Nogales, I have come to realize that advocacy work and the economy, along with most facets of the borderlands, are deeply interconnected, working together to create communities where people come together to enact change and stand in solidarity by looking out for each other. Where policy and political will fails, communities have stepped in to advocate for and take care of the people around them.