Toward 2050 in Virginia

A Roundtable Report on the Old Dominion's Increasing Diversity

Julie Ajinkya and Sam Fulwood   October 2011

Center for American Progress

PROGRESS 2050

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Progress 2050, a project of the Center for American Progress, seeks to lead, broaden, and strengthen the progressive movement by working toward a more inclusive progressive agenda—one that truly reflects our nation's rich ethnic and racial diversity. By 2050 there will be no ethnic majority in our nation and to ensure that the unprecedented growth of communities of color also yields future prosperity, we work to close racial disparities across the board with innovative policies that work for all.

Lifting Up What Works®

PolicyLink

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works.®

Founded in 1999, PolicyLink connects the work of people on the ground to the creation of sustainable communities of opportunity that allow everyone to participate and prosper. Such communities offer access to quality jobs, affordable housing, good schools, transportation, and the benefits of healthy food and physicalactivity. Guided by the belief that those closest to the nation's challenges are central to finding solutions, PolicyLink relies on the wisdom, voice, and experience of local residents and organizations. Lifting Up What Works is our way of focusing attention on how people are working successfully to use local, state, and federal policy to create conditions that benefit everyone, especially people in low-income communities and communities of color. We share our findings and analysis through our publications, website and online tools, convenings, national summits, and in briefings with national and local policymakers. Our work is grounded in the conviction that equity—just, fair, and green inclusion—mustdrive all policy decisions.

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Introduction and summary

By now, well into the first quarter of the 21st century, very few Americans can claim to be unaware of the rapid and pervasive population changes sweeping across our nation. We see the new faces of a more diverse and multicultural America everywhere. It's present on nearly every corner, street, and intersection, from the urban core to inner-ring suburban developments, and from expanding exurbs to disappearing rural farms.

The most recent U.S. Census Bureau data project that the United States will no longer have a clear racial or ethnic majority by the year 2050.[1] Yet we know that there are still significant racial and ethnic disparities in the fields of employment, education, and health.

If these disparities are reduced over the coming decades, then our nation's increasingly diverse workforce will offer us a strong global competitive advantage against other developed countries that are struggling with aging populations and shrinking workforces. But if these disparities persist, then the United States will arguably have squandered away one of its greatest assets and contributors to economic growth in the 21st century.

In many communities this demographic shift has already taken place. This transition to living as majority-minority communities is happening at different paces, of course, within states and cities. Case in point: Between 2000 and 2010 92 percent of national population growth came from people of color but 76.1 percent of Virginia's population growth came from residents of color.

As a national policy organization, it is essential that we understand how demographic change will affect our politics and policy. And we can start doing that right now by learning from the places that are in the vanguard of our demographic transition. Progress 2050, a project of the Center for American Progress, and PolicyLink, a national research and action institute advancing economic and social

equity, formed a partnership to initiate just such a national conversation to explore a new vision of what America can and should be in 2050.

The longer-term objective of this effort is to learn from local leaders what investments are needed to make sure our nation embraces its diverse future. We intend for these conversations to inform CAP's policy agenda and ultimately craft policy that lifts up communities of color and creates a future in which all can prosper.

And that's why Progress 2050 and PolicyLink selected Northern Virginia, a diverse and economically thriving community in the shadow of the familiar monuments of the nation's capital, as the first in a series of many local conversations that bring together community leaders, advocates, activists, and academics to discuss regional and issue-oriented questions related to the ongoing demographic shifts.

We tailored our Northern Virginia conversation to allow participants (see attached list of convening participants on page 15 of this report) to share best practices, lessons learned, challenges, and recommendations for the future around the broad vision for 2050, and discussed the role of small businesses in spurring inclusive economic growth. While CAP and PolicyLink will choose a theme for each roundtable discussion, we seek to foster open discussion about issues important to each community.

In the report that follows, we provide an account of this conversation—held this past July in Arlington, Virginia. The account begins with some demographic context about the state of Virginia. Then we report the opportunities and challenges that participants identified in their experience with small-business development and workforce strategies.

Lastly, we also recount how the roundtable's participants steered the conversation away from this topic to discuss the greater underlying need for civic engagement within Virginia's communities of color. Only with a more developed sense of civic engagement, participants argued, could communities of color advocate for a new, inclusive definition of what it means to be American, and the political power to reduce racial and ethnic disparities across employment, education, and other social indicators.

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Why Virginia?

To set the stage for our conversation, Professor Qian Cai, director of the Demographics and Workforce Group at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, presented research on Virginia's population changes and argued that the state's demographic shift is a microcosmic glimpse of what our nation will soon experience. In particular, the commonwealth's demographic and economic growth during the past decade was dramatically affected by the swelling presence of people of color migrating to or being born within its boundaries. Consider these statistics:

- **Residents of color.** Residents of color account for three of every four new Virginia residents (701,696 people or 76 percent) since 2000. That figure dwarfs the number of new white residents (220,813 people or 24 percent) in the same period.[2]

- **Foreign born.** One in every 10 residents is foreign born, with the majority hailing from Asia (40 percent) or Latin America (36 percent).[3] In the past decade alone, the state's Asian American population grew by 220,000 and its Latino population grew by 300,000. There are almost 100 languages other than English spoken in homes across Virginia, with Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog among the most popular languages.[4]

- **Demographic trends.** In the past three years, 12 percent of Virginia's births were Hispanic children while 19 percent were African American and 6 percent were Asian American. The majority of the under-18 population were people of color in 22 localities in 2000, rising to 32 localities in 2010.[5]

Cai noted that Virginia is experiencing rapid demographic shifts that will make its future population and workforce increasingly diverse. New Virginians are already making their presence felt across the region in many positive and often-overlooked ways. The percentage of small businesses owned by people of color, for example, has grown impressively between 2002 and 2007. Small businesses

owned by African Americans increased by 54 percent, Hispanic ownership increased by 51 percent, and Asian American ownership increased by 47 percent.[6]

At the same time, Virginia's population growth is also highly uneven across communities. Metropolitan parts of the state, for instance, will see sharp rises among people of color while rural areas will experience more population loss due to aging and out-migration. Accordingly, residents of color are concentrated in Northern Virginia, where many of the state's metropolitan centers are located.

Such imbalance makes the overall diversity less apparent in some regions, particularly where older, white, and poorer residents predominate. And, Cai noted, there lies the long-term challenge of a generational gap, with those who are aging and who do not identify with a more diverse younger population. This may cause some elderly Virginians to feel more reluctant to contribute to investments that lift up entire communities.

In short, Virginia is one of the states at the forefront of demographic changes that the rest of the country will soon experience. "If disparities continue, our nation is not going to be prosperous," Cai said. "It is imperative that we understand this locally, in addition to nationally."

Small-business development and preparing tomorrow's workers

PolicyLink founder and chief executive Angela Glover Blackwell, who facilitated the roundtable discussion, began by highlighting the fact that similar demographic shifts will inevitably occur across the United States. The question for national policy, she argued, is whether public- and private-sector leaders will make the investments needed to take advantage of the opportunity of diversity and secure a prosperous future for all.

CAP and PolicyLink chose the theme of small-business development and smart workforce strategies for Virginia's roundtable for two reasons. First, Virginia is getting older and more diverse. Between 2010 and 2030, among Virginia's 20-65-year-olds, the white population is projected to decline by 44,000 while the African American population will increase by 243,000, the Asian American population will increase by 154,000, and the Latino population will increase by 227,000.[7]

Second, Virginia has done particularly well with small-business ownership and entrepreneurial activities in its communities of color. This rise in entrepreneurial activity is also consistent with the national story that reports large numbers of small-business owners of color. Studies show that immigrants, in particular, are nearly 30 percent more likely to start a business than nonimmigrants.[8]

Opportunities and challenges

Given the economic challenges we are experiencing as a nation, small-business ownership is an especially important topic to discuss as an engine of job creation. Virginia may have some useful lessons to share with other states and the nation in terms of how it has spurred businesses owned by people of color.

One of the foremost challenges that participants immediately raised was the lack of educational outreach available to communities of color interested in starting their own businesses. A participant from the state's Small Business Development

Center explained that more people of color are interested in starting new businesses, yet many do not have the prerequisite credit scores required for bank loans and are unable to get off the ground. Another participant from the state's Black Chamber of Commerce agreed that there are a growing number of people who are interested in entrepreneurial activities but there is a great need for more information about financing and instructional guidance about how much work it takes to start a business.

Another participant pointed to federal contracting as a potential area where small-business owners of color could more effectively bid for procurement contracts. As of now, Virginia has dismal rates of federal procurement contracts obtained by people of color because they are often not certified to be on the list of qualified bidders.

Despite these low procurement rates, one participant noted that the Virginia Megaprojects model should be noted for its ability to employ small businesses of color. The state's Megaprojects are a group of large-scale construction projects in Northern Virginia that aim to improve multiple modes of transportation and ride-sharing, and to create a new highway network for carpools and buses called High Occupancy Toll lanes. Contractors for this project have been able to meet—if not surpass—their fairly substantial goals of diversity by approaching the project's own Civil Rights Program Office, which maintains lists of certified clients of color to act as subcontractors for a range of construction needs.[9] This office exists to assist small businesses owned by women and people of color with doing business with state government entities.

Yet more investments need to be made to help small businesses obtain the certification necessary to place them on such lists. These efforts that centralize information about businesses of color are vital to efficiently connect contractors and clients.

Another primary concern of participants was the ability of small businesses to grow. While many small businesses start out as cottage-style operations with modest goals, participants with small-business consulting experience at the state level argued that businesses would only be able to contribute to economic growth if they were open to becoming scalable industries. There is also a great need for training to expand the scale of cottage industry ideas that are prevalent in communities of color, given the fact that 25 percent of Virginians who work full time are still below the federal poverty line.

Virginia has dismal rates of federal procurement contracts obtained by people of color.

One of the strongest opportunities provided by the high levels of entrepreneurial activity in Virginia's communities of color is the ability to spur job creation—a crucial matter across the United States today. But in order for businesses to employ members of these communities, participants believed that challenges presented by current educational disparities across racial and ethnic groups must be addressed.

In fact, participants repeatedly returned to the problem of limited educational opportunities as a root cause of stagnated growth in communities of color. Both an education leader and a social service activist separately noted the dramatic increase in at-risk youth of color who have high dropout and truancy rates. Despite the growth in Virginia's enrollment of students of color, the state has yet to invest crucial resources to keep these youths in school or provide job-training programs to at least encourage a school-to-work pipeline.

Educating the future workforce: An urgent challenge

One of the particular problems that participants noted is the prevalence in the educational system of low expectations for youth of color. If school authorities, parents, and others do not believe in these students' chances for success, then young people fall prey to unreasonably low expectations. While Virginia's high school dropout rate is slightly lower than the national average, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that dropout rates are far higher among students of color than their non-Hispanic counterparts.

In 2009, for example, black students in Virginia had a 9.3 percent dropout rate and Hispanic students had a 17.6 percent dropout rate, both far higher than non-Hispanic white students at 5.2 percent. And, ultimately, these rates affect the ability of students of color to find gainful employment in their adult lives. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of August 2011, the national unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma was 4.7 percentage points higher than those who had graduated from high school.[10]

A roundtable participant who works with the Arlington school system argued that one of the factors that may be at play in the high dropout rates is the dearth of role models and leaders from communities of color who serve as teachers in Virginia's classrooms. If students do not see successful members of their community in the educational setting, it may hinder their ability to relate and establish strong teacher/student relationships. What's more, the ability of a teacher to connect and understand their students is key to creating a positive relationship.

In response to this problem, another educational professional highlighted the scholarship programs at historically black colleges and universities that encourage young black males to go into the teaching profession. This initiative could serve as an effective model for Virginia colleges as well—helping to boost the morale of young students of color by exemplifying role models in the classroom who would look different from the vast majority of Virginia teachers who are currently white, middle class, and female.

Finally, despite their lack of scholarship programs similar to this initiative, Virginia's community colleges were referenced numerous times as positive models that are working to bridge the school-to-work pipeline. Northern Virginia Community College in particular was highlighted for its one-year apprenticeship program. This program allows students who have graduated and are 18 years of age, yet are unsure of their career paths, to obtain an apprenticeship in various training programs that are approved through the Apprentice Division of the Virginia State Department of Labor and Industry. The program lasts for one year and students earn a certificate upon completion.[11]

Participants did note, however, that there was one group of students who are often shut out of many of these initiatives. Undocumented students are often unable to pursue higher education because many four-year state colleges have begun requiring students to provide proof of citizenship or legal residency. While this policy is not a state law in Virginia, many schools in the state started denying admission to undocumented students based on a 2003 recommendation by the state attorney general.[12] Nonetheless, participants praised the Virginia schools that continue to open their doors to undocumented students, providing important education and employment coaching to some of the country's most promising students regardless of immigration status.[13]

Despite the proven success of many community college initiatives in encouraging students to successfully enter the workforce, many participants lamented that the state does not invest in such workforce development programs. Instead, community colleges are incentivized to push more students into degree programs—even if their completion rates are less than satisfactory.

Participants who have worked closely with career and technical training programs argued that it is important for the state to invest in building direct pathways from schooling to obtaining credentials to enter the workforce, in tandem with support for degree-completion initiatives. Because Virginia's community colleges have had considerable success with both types of programs, we have highlighted some of the state's most promising community college initiatives in the box titled "Best practice: Virginia's community colleges." (see box)

Best practice: Virginia's community colleges

Participants applauded Virginia's community colleges for hosting a number of promising initiatives that help diverse groups of students with the school-to-work pipeline. One such program, the Commonwealth Scholars initiative, aims to increase the number of "middle majority" (middle-class Americans, who comprise the majority of the nation) and first-generation high school graduates who successfully complete a specified program of courses that is designed to help them succeed in community colleges and universities. The program of study is introduced to students in the eighth grade and specializes in math and science requirements, in addition to foreign language study, and career and technical education classes.

Virginia's community colleges also boast strong Workforce Development Services, which help prepare students to join the workforce by providing access to career coaches and specialized job training. In 2010 colleges received nearly $500,000 to develop or improve workforce training programs that were targeted toward high-demand, high-growth industries.[14] Specific programs included: advanced manufacturing, allied health, construction trades, green technologies, hospitality, and tourism. All colleges also participated in an annual showcase called the Institutes of Excellence, where projects host informational booths sharing their curriculum, marketing materials, and outcomes to allow attending schools to learn best practices from colleagues across the state.

The importance of renewing our commitment to civic engagement

A theme that emerged from the roundtable discussion examined the root causes behind inequity in the state. The gap between Virginia's richest and poorest families is 11th largest in the nation, while the gap between its richest families and families in the middle is 10th largest in the nation.[15] This portion of the convening ultimately focused on the importance of developing a sense of civic engagement in communities of color to battling this inequity—from prevailing in the political power struggle that underlies disparate circumstances to redefining new communities' understanding of the American Dream.

Civic engagement was seen as the answer to ensure the state's path forward is inclusive of all its communities. A filmmaker and political activist launched this portion of the conversation by expressing frustration that communities of color are experiencing historic growth in numbers but are not experiencing proportional growth in political power. For instance, she argued, while new and growing communities of color boast the actual numbers to affect electoral outcomes, there is an underdeveloped sense of civic engagement that leads to low political participation.

The reasons for low levels of political participation are numerous. Some participants noted that many immigrants self-segregate themselves from the political process in the United States because they migrate from sending countries where the political process is not open and people cannot participate without fear from physical threat.

Others argued that this lack of civic and political participation is also enabled by an entrenched political system. A local elected leader, for instance, explained that people in power are often reluctant to relinquish that power. He added that multiracial voting coalitions have successfully united voting groups, applied pressure to this entrenched system, and effectively fought for more political voice.

Another participant argued that the profit-driven, conflict-driven media also contributes to the disenfranchisement of certain communities by constructing

a fearful narrative of changing demographics. He believes that communities of color must compete in a "game narrative war," using new social media outlets to tell their own positive stories of demographic change. The real war, he argued, is between the people who control the news and the people who are consumers of content. If we do not allow the media to distract us with stories that emphasize division within our communities, he argued, then we can encourage groups to unite with one another to fight for political representation and inclusion.

Developing a sense of civic engagement, this group reasoned, would necessitate reevaluating and redefining the organizing principle of the American Dream. Participants argued that the American promise has been reduced to the notions of prosperity and wealth—to the exclusion of democracy and self-governance. In order to move all of our communities forward, the full idea of America should be prioritized—political and economic opportunity for all. An emphasis on political and cultural growth, instead of entirely economic growth, would unite communities across different racial and ethnic boundaries with the common question of what it means to be American.

Others underscored the importance of focusing on American values that allow for civic participation in the first place. Even though some new immigrants might be more hesitant to participate politically because of their experience with political oppression in their countries of origin, one local civic leader said that there may be another side to this coin. New Americans, he argued, might possess the unique ability to appreciate the privileges of citizenship that allow them to become politically engaged—even more so than other communities who have never known these rights to be restricted.

On the whole, the roundtable participants agreed on the importance of encouraging Virginia's communities of color to develop a stronger sense of civic engagement as their numbers continue to rise. While they are already contributing to small-business development in record numbers, it will be important to fight for political inclusion so that their communities also prosper from the state's economic growth. Participants highlighted a number of such inclusive local initiatives that have already made large strides toward improving levels of civic engagement among the state's residents of color. We spotlight two such initiatives below. (see boxes)

> Participants agreed on the importance of encouraging Virginia's communities of color to develop a stronger sense of civic engagement.

Best practice: Parent Leadership Training Institute

In response to the discussion about civic engagement, participants pointed to the Parent Leadership Training Institute of Alexandria, Virginia, as an example of a program that is successful at fostering parental involvement in the political system. PLTI emerged in 2006 out of a sense of community need for a program that enhanced parental leadership skills for effective children's advocacy. It was modeled after a long-running program of the same name in Connecticut after a former Alexandria City Council member heard the executive director of the Connecticut Commission on Children, and founder of PLTI, talk about the program at a conference of city officials. The Alexandria official was inspired to bring the program to Virginia and saw it as a creative way to revolutionize democracy by incorporating more diverse parent voices in the decision-making process that primarily affected their children.[16]

Each year the Alexandria's PTLI brings 20 to 25 parents from different socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and regional backgrounds together for a 20-week program that its supporters call "an exercise in democracy." From the selection process itself, the program strives to be as democratic and inclusive as possible. The classes are free of charge, for instance, and meals as well as complimentary child care are also provided for all attending parents. The program specifically seeks out applicants who are not traditionally involved in the school system in order to bring new voices to the table to advocate for the county's children.

The program begins with a retreat to define the mission of the gathering and is then split into a 10-week course on parent leadership and a subsequent 10-week civics program that finishes with a capstone community project. The first session is entitled "Thriving with Diversity in the Group Process." It addresses not only current race, ethnic, and class differences in the community but it also addresses what America will look like in the future and how this will influence the educational system. From there on, parents are trained in public policy, budgeting, community building, and other leadership skills considered crucial in participating in a democracy.[17]

Alexandria's PLTI has been a resounding success in encouraging civic participation among parents who were originally overwhelmed at parent-teacher association meetings but understood how important it was to get involved in their children's education. Graduates of the institute have gone on to serve on citywide boards, commissions, system advisory committees, and the superintendent's group to study the achievement gap. The institute defies the defeatist mentality that parents can't be change agents and in fact promotes the slogan, "It's amazing what one parent can do."[18]

Best practice: Diversity dialogues

An elected member of the Arlington County Board raised the example of an initiative called the Diversity Dialogues, which successfully brings together diverse voices to make policy recommendations for a more inclusive county. The board member said that the program aims to take advantage of the great history of diversity in Arlington, from being the only county in Virginia (outside of the counties that became West Virginia) that refused to secede during the Civil War to being the first county to racially integrate its schools. The county, he said, encourages community members to have meaningful conversation about what it means to know someone of another color, language, and culture.

The county has hosted a number of dialogues since 2008, with roughly 160 participants at each gathering. The dialogues follow the World Café methodology, where four individuals have a series of conversational rounds at each table, lasting from 20 to 45 minutes, where they discuss one or more question prompts that are personally meaningful to them. At the end of each round, all but one of the participants (who remains as the table host) rotates to another table to either begin a new conversation or deepen the thread that they carry with them. At the end of several rounds, the whole group gathers to discuss common themes, insights, best practices, and lessons learned.

The council member made clear that the purpose of the dialogues is to address issues that can be uncomfortable to discuss at times, particularly issues such as race, sexuality, and age. The most pressing diversity-related matters that have emerged out of recent dialogues are:

- **Affordable housing and retail.** The area's economic development has translated into displacement of long-term residents who can no longer afford to live in the newly developed neighborhoods.

- **Language and communication.** Language is often a barrier to communication and those with limited English proficiency too often believe they do not have the same rights as those who are proficient in English.

- **Integrating public spaces.** Community design should consider diverse needs that allow an assortment of people to gather, particularly by supporting public transportation options to access such space.

- **Shared commitment.** While some community members might embrace diversity in theory, it is another issue altogether to get them to embrace it in action.

- **Sustained commitment to diversity.** Consistent and ongoing efforts are needed even after these dialogues to continue the momentum and encourage further integration of the community.

These discussions resulted in a series of recommendations that were compiled by a Diversity Dialogues Task Force, and the county board voted unanimously to refer the report and its recommendations to the county manager. The councilman reported at the convening that a number of these recommendations are now in the process of turning into policies, citing growth and affordable housing policy as two examples.

He reiterated that the dialogues have worked wonders in Arlington, but in order for them to be successful over the long haul, the government and community need political will, the commitment to dedicate time, the participation of educated citizenry, and the strength to not be shy about discussing issues that are often uncomfortable to address.

Conclusion

As our nation moves closer to becoming a country with no racial or ethic majority, there are a handful of communities that are already experiencing this shift. These communities hold invaluable wisdom about how these population changes affect community members, as well as the opportunities and challenges offered by policy initiatives developed in response to these changes. Virginia is one such community. And as the first location chosen for our series of roundtables, it proved to be an instructive example of how a community can embrace diversity as one of its greatest assets.

While the theme of the convening was small-business development and the success of the state's communities of color in spurring economic growth, participants also wanted to focus on the underlying need for greater civic engagement of diverse populations. They felt strongly that policy initiatives aiming to reduce racial and ethnic disparities are not sustainable without systemic growth in political power that is proportionate to the population growth that communities of color are experiencing.

Each community, of course, experiences demographic change in its own unique way, embedded in a region-specific history of race relations and immigrant integration. Yet the importance that Virginia's participants placed on the systemic need for civic engagement is likely to translate across different communities.

The full flowering of the idea of America can be a strong, unifying organizing principle that incorporates all American communities across racial and ethnic boundaries. And as our country continues to move closer to a time where the majority and minority labels lose all meaning, we will need a vision that underlines what we all hold in common instead of one that underscores obsolete divisions.

List of participants at the July convening in Northern Virginia

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George Mason University

Dr. Rosa Briceño
Project Interaction, Arlington Public Schools

Camille Bussette
Center for American Progress

Eric Byler
The Coffee Party

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Gloria Flanagan
Alexandria Small Business Development Center

Tim Freilich
Legal Aid Justice Center

Meredith Gunter
Demographics & Workforce Group at UVA

John Halpin
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Northern Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce

Jon Liss
Virginia New Majority

Nadine Marsh-Carter
Center for American Progress

Tram Nguyen
Virginia New Majority

J. Walter Tejada
County Board Member, Arlington, Virginia

Annabel Park
The Coffee Party

Douglas Smith
Virginia Interfaith Center

Louis Soares
Center for American Progress

Theresa Teekah
Virginia Department of Health

Honorable Walter Tejada
Arlington County Board

Endnotes

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