

# Toward 2050 in Virginia

A Roundtable Report on the Old Dominion's Increasing Diversity

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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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