EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The demographics of the United States are changing profoundly. Our cities and towns are growing more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. By the middle of the 20th century, more than half of the U.S. population will be individuals of color. PAS Report 593, Planning With Diverse Communities, offers planners the tools and strategies to better engage people of color in planning processes and improve quality of life for all in diverse communities.

Cities and suburbs are reflecting this growing diversity at the macro and micro levels. Many states, such as California and New Mexico, have been “majority minority” for decades, as have many of the nation’s largest cities, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Detroit. This is now becoming true for smaller communities across the United States as well. Many urban cores are gentrifying, bringing whites back to the city, and many Asians, African Americans, and Latinos are moving to the suburbs. Together these demographic and geographical trends paint a picture of increasingly diversifying spaces.

But places in the United States have historically been highly segregated by race, which has translated to economic inequality—creating a gap between white and black or brown as well as between rich and poor. Although these gaps are narrowing with the dissolution of redlining, racial covenants, and other institutionalized discriminatory policies, clear geographic inequalities based on race and ethnicity still exist in our cities and towns today. Many African Americans, Latinos, and immigrants live in concentrated poverty. Whether created by policy outcomes or self-selection, segregated neighborhoods often have fewer employment opportunities, good schools, or quality amenities to offer their residents.

This PAS Report examines these existing conditions and coming demographic changes, and it offers planners tools and techniques to help them better serve their diverse constituencies and plan more equitably and effectively. It aims to provide planners with the necessary knowledge to:

- understand how racial and ethnic diversity is driving demographic changes in the United States and how these changes are manifesting geographically
- recognize some of the historical and current economic and social disparities that affect different races and ethnicities within the nation
- engage people of color meaningfully in the planning process
- explore strategies and tools that promote the well-being of people of color, especially those who are also low income, including economic opportunities, access to transportation, housing options, health and safety, and placemaking efforts
- increase cultural competency and support planning for diversity

Planners are compelled by the ethical standards of the profession to represent all communities, particularly those that are least empowered. The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct requires planners to work toward social justice and provide choice and opportunity for everyone. It states that planners should promote racial and economic integration and acknowledges that they have a special responsibility to those who have been historically disadvantaged.

Planners should work with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to ensure a good quality of life for all residents of diverse communities, especially the underserved. Public participation provides opportunities to create places that are responsive to the values of their communities, and planners must embrace inclusive, participatory practices to encourage the input of people of color, including immigrants, in decision-making processes. Planners can better achieve both of these aims by increasing their cultural competency through attitudes and actions that allow them to function effectively across cultural differences, particularly those of race and ethnicity.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IS DRIVING DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

People of color are expected to outnumber whites in the United States by the mid-2040s. These changes are driven by increases in both native-born and foreign-born populations. Latinos, African Americans, and Asians have higher fertility rates than whites; in 2010, about half of infants younger than one year of age were identified by the U.S. Census as people of color. Interracial marriage rates also have grown considerably since the 1970s, along with the number of multiracial individuals. Diverse and interrelated conditions in immigrants’
home countries and the United States, such as economic conditions, the extent of civil liberties and safety, and environmental catastrophes and civil strife, are driving immigration rates toward historic highs. Chapter 1 of this report discusses these demographic changes.

Many kinds of racially and ethnically diverse places are emerging from these demographic shifts. Chapter 3 focuses on two types of quickly changing places frequently encountered by planners: diversifying suburbs and gentrifying central city neighborhoods. Diverse suburbs are those that have no dominant racial or ethnic group. In the 20th century, diverse suburbs existed but were relatively scarce. Interrelated factors, such as reductions in housing discrimination, economic changes in the wake of the recent Great Recession, and central city redevelopment, are now leading people of color and newly arrived immigrants to move to the suburbs.

Gentrifying central city neighborhoods are also experiencing dramatic demographic and socioeconomic changes, often resulting in the displacement of lower-income residents who are people of color. Various forces drive gentrification in these places, including rapid investment following historical disinvestment, changing housing and locational preferences among young professional millennials and white baby boomers, and a lack of strong local affordable housing policies. Both bottom-up and top-down dynamics contribute to gentrification in central city neighborhoods.

The cultural and economic diversity of diverse suburbs and gentrifying central city neighborhoods create many challenges for planners. These include nonconforming uses and code violations, conflicts over the use of public space, social service and amenity mismatches, and a lack of affordable housing. These challenges arise out of the need to balance the broader public interest with meeting the needs of diverse racial and ethnic groups in these communities.

Chapter 2 of this report examines how many people of color face significant social and economic challenges stemming from historical patterns of racism and racial and ethnic discrimination. Although today whites are more likely to live with people of color than ever before, segregation between whites and African Americans as well as Latinos and other immigrant groups remains high. Racial and ethnic segregation is an outcome of complex factors, including housing discrimination, income and wealth differences, and immigration status. The consequences of isolation are reflected in lower incomes and levels of educational attainment, along with higher unemployment and rates of incarceration, among people of color. Planners have a responsibility to help work towards remediating persistent racial and ethnic segregation, as these processes contribute to extensive place-based inequalities that affect the well-being and livelihood of people in the United States.

Research shows that access to health care, high-quality education, and high levels of employment opportunities improve the quality of life in a geographic area. In the United States today, there is an ever-increasing divide between those who have access to these amenities and services and those who do not. This divide is prominent and visible between whites and racial and ethnic minorities, including those who are unauthorized immigrants. Immigration status dramatically affects the likelihood of finding quality housing or stable employment. Moreover, unauthorized immigrants live with the fear of being removed from their families and communities by immigration authorities.

PEOPLE OF COLOR MUST BE INCLUDED IN PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESSES

Community engagement is an ongoing process that entails facilitating the participation of residents, especially diverse or underrepresented groups, in neighborhood and local planning and design efforts. Residents engaged in participatory planning processes feel more informed about, engaged with, and connected to their communities.

Chapter 4 of this report provides planners with guidance for effective community engagement, which is more of an art than a science and can be difficult for practitioners to navigate. Common milestones at the foundation of effective community engagement include getting to know the community, connecting with community partners, and picking the appropriate strategy. The International Association for Public Participation’s Public Participation Spectrum—in-
form, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower—provides a framework for engaging community members and building their capacity over time.

Immigrants and people of color often experience barriers that prevent them from participating in community planning processes. Common barriers include lack of transportation, child care, money, time, information, language, literacy, and trust. Chapter 4 offers a wide range of strategies that planners can use to help overcome these barriers. Common to all is the need to engage with underserved communities of color and build partnerships with trusted institutions in those communities to better understand local challenges to participation in planning processes and how to best address those challenges.

**MANY STRATEGIES AND TOOLS CAN PROMOTE WELL-BEING IN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

Chapter 5 of this report explores a wide range of policies and tools that support the general welfare of people of color—especially those who are also low income—by improving their employment options, access to transportation, housing choices, health and safety, and quality of places and spaces.

One fundamental strategy is to expand economic opportunities. Microentrepreneurship, small and home-based businesses, and day labor can fill widespread and ongoing seasonal and underemployment gaps often experienced by immigrants and people of color. Planners can support these economic opportunities by ensuring that local regulations allow these self-employment options and that licensing and permitting processes are understandable and easy to navigate, even by those who speak a language other than English. Planners can also engage in public education on how these activities add vitality to neighborhoods and fill income gaps.

Another strategy is activating mobility. People of color and immigrants are more likely to be transit-dependent—that is, they must rely on public or active transportation modes for essential and nonessential activities and have little or no access to a car. Critical features of public transit systems that support both transit-dependent and choice riders are high coverage combined with high frequency of service and networks that focus on coverage within an area as well as across different urban areas.

A key strategy to minimize inequity is offering adequate and appropriate housing options for all. People of color and immigrants—who may have lower incomes and more extensive or intergenerational households—require housing that is both adaptable and affordable. Adaptability is a feature of housing that allows occupants and owners opportunities for incremental expansion, multigenerational living, and higher-density occupancy. Affordability for both renters and homebuyers can be supported by a wide range of programs and housing types.

Addressing health and safety concerns is a vital strategy in ensuring the well-being of communities of color, which are disproportionately likely to face negative environmental impacts of unwanted land uses or live in underserved, underresourced areas. The environmental justice movement has brought some awareness of and change around these issues, and there are many ways planners can work to improve the quality of life for communities of color. These include providing better access to healthy foods, parks and green space, and basic services where they are lacking, and improving pedestrian infrastructure and public safety where it is needed.

Placemaking is another important strategy through which diverse communities can celebrate cultural identity, strengthen community, and expand economic opportunity. Planners might engage with formal, top-down, local government-led placemaking projects or events both large and small in scale, or they might help coordinate or expand on more informal, bottom-up placemaking activities or activism. Planners can help create more inclusive places by learning about the social and cultural values of communities of color, engaging residents early and often in culturally meaningful and relevant projects, seeking visions generated from the existing community in areas undergoing or at risk of economic decline or gentrification, and securing funding and modifying regulations to support and enhance placemaking efforts.

**PLANNERS MUST INCREASE THEIR CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND SUPPORT DIVERSITY**

One of the pervasive themes throughout this report is the need for planners to become familiar with and engage directly with the people of color within their jurisdictions. Chapter 1 introduces cultural competency as the vital set of skills that enables planners to better communicate and to plan more effectively, respectfully, and compassionately with communities of color. Building cultural competency is central to planning neighborhoods and cities that serve the needs of diverse groups and people.

However, learning and practicing cultural competency is not yet central to planning education, though it has been integrated within other disciplines. Most planners learn about
cultural competency through interacting with others in their workplaces, in their everyday lives, or by seeking out resources on this topic—such as this PAS Report.

To be more effective in serving all of their constituents, planners will need to take the time to understand and move beyond their own implicit biases, which may often be hidden from themselves. Blind spots develop because of personal background and experiences as well as broader societal narratives. Developing cultural competency takes time and practice. Implicit biases are unintentional, but recognizing these biases is an essential first step.

Planners and planning organizations should also commit to improving diversity planning within their jurisdictions. Chapter 6 closes with suggestions to help begin or expand on such efforts.

**CONCLUSION**

This report is concerned with racial (e.g., African American, Asian) and ethnic (e.g., Latino) diversity in the United States. Changing demographics mean that planners in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors must plan for an increasing number of individuals and families of color. This is a challenge but also an opportunity. Planners can have a positive impact by working to address both historical and current inequities and providing people of color equitable access to opportunity in housing, transportation, employment, and other domains of life.

Unequal conditions have become so entrenched in our society that they may seem inevitable or irreversible. But this need not be so. Just as earlier planners may have had a hand in creating some of these uneven conditions through land-use decisions and other policies, so too can today’s planners play a role in harnessing diverse interconnections to help build more just cities. Planners can rectify some of the harmful effects of racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and discrimination through more inclusive public policies, programs, and practices. Planners have a responsibility to try to remedy these inequalities, and they are uniquely positioned to help their jurisdictions and communities reap the potential benefits of growing diversity through more equitable strategies and more inclusive forms of engagement.