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Advocating for the Immigrant Domestic Work Force: Recommendations for Planners

By Alvaro Huerta

As city and regional planners, we plan and build livable communities and regions for the public. But these plans often exclude the low-wage workers who carry out the domestic household services in mostly middle-class and affluent communities. This work force includes those who clean our homes, take care of our children, and maintain our yards. These workers — many of them recent immigrants and racial minorities — are not well represented in the planning process.

The bureaucratic planning process, for example, commonly fails to provide adequate public transportation for nannies and housecleaners, who toil inside suburban homes and gated communities. In addition, planners typically don't solicit feedback or input from paid Latino gardeners when designing and creating suburban front yards — an American obsession. Meanwhile, many immigrant workers lack the time, language skills, and educational background to have a voice in the formal planning process.



Alvaro Huerta and gardeners. Photo by Ed Carre N Photography.

Who Are They?

The immigrant domestic household economy encompasses housecleaners, paid gardeners and, very often, day laborers. This informal work force — mostly Latino immigrants in California and beyond — has taken over the traditional household duties and responsibilities that many Americans assumed before World War II, when women regularly stayed home to care for their

