



Higher Education

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

- **Take five minutes** to review the [Executive Summary](#) for this brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief:
 - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
 - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share with the Group During Your Discussion

- [Average tuition and fees](#) have more than doubled for private, nonprofit four-year institutions and for public two-year institutions between 1989 and 2019. For public four-year institutions over that same time period, tuition and fees have almost tripled.
- As of the beginning of 2022, roughly [43.4 million Americans](#) owed [\\$1.75 trillion](#) in student loans. This places the [average debt per student at over \\$40,000](#).
- Over the course of their careers, a college graduate will outearn a high school graduate by an estimated [\\$1 million](#).

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** How should the performance of professors, administrators and higher education institutions be evaluated?
- **Local, State or Federal Government:** How do you think higher education should be funded and delivered? What do you think the role of federal and state governments should be?
- **Business:** What hiring challenges do local businesses have? What opportunities are there for improving the skills gap?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify the status of higher education in your community. Identify the opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of higher education laws in your community.** Look into education governance and the committees that set goals and visions, such as your state's Higher Education Board or local institutions' boards of trustees.
3. **Investigate community programs.** Search for [yourstate].gov + "education," or look on your state government website for its Department of Education. See what kinds of scholarships, grants, and college-bound programs are available, and how your state presents financial aid opportunities.
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on higher education and their visions for how to tackle the challenges regarding post-secondary education facing Americans at large and your community specifically. You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on higher education in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
 - [K-12 Education](#)
 - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
 - [Education Savings Accounts](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.