Higher Education Reform Discussion Guide

AGENDA:

- Social Time (30 minutes)
- Within each group identify who will be:
  - **Timekeeper** to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak,
  - **Scribe** to take a few notes of what has been discussed, and post a summary on the Policy Circle website;
  - **Reporter** someone who will report back to the bigger group what was discussed
  - **Facilitator** to keep the conversation going around the circle, asking some questions in this guide if necessary. The role of the facilitator is to invite each member to share their perspective, and help focus the conversation on understanding the issue and becoming influencers.
- #CircleUp: Circle discussion (45-60min)
- Circle Recap (20min): the reporter and the scribe report back to the bigger group what was discussed;
- Next Steps (15min):
  - Discuss how to influence policy making e.g. attend town hall meetings of representatives, op ends;
  - Fix meeting date of the next meeting;
  - Decide on topic for next meeting - go deeper on the topic covered, focus on state issue or use another brief available in The Policy Circle Online Library

KEY FACTS:

**Free Market Principle**: Choice and flexibility are key. Our higher education system needs to allow for choice - online learning, vocational training, etc. to provide young individuals with the choice and equip them to best pursue their own economic ends and in turn contribute to economic growth and production.

**Historic Fact**: Federal involvement in higher education has grown continuously. In 1950, 8 percent of American workers had a college degree. In 2000, 30 percent did.

**Facts to Know**:

- Value of high school diploma declining. College degree has become more expensive than ever - out of reach for many middle class families
  - "Moderate" college budget for in-state public college in 2013-2014: $22,826
  - Moderate budget at private college averaged $44,750
- 40 million Americans now carry student loan debt - up from 29 million in 2008 and most recent college grads work in jobs that don't require degrees.
- Federal student loans outstanding now $1 trillion +
- Higher education industry is enormous - in 2009, higher education institutions received approx. $497 billion in total revenues, including $144 billion in federal grants and loans.
GOVERNMENT ROLE:

- **Liberal Argument:** Government should expand access to college by increasing funding for higher education, cut interest rates on student loans.
- **Conservative Argument:** Putting more money into the current education system will inflate tuition; we should create more models, alternatives, and financing options for higher education. Proposed conservative solutions include:
  - Redirect some higher education funding to vocational training
  - Liberalize the accreditation process and allow more types of educational institutions to emerge
  - Encourage creative college financing - e.g., Senator Rubio’s income share agreements proposal
  - Publicize economic outcomes for student by college and major, for more informed decisions
  - Make college partially responsible for student-loan defaults
  - Consolidate the numerous higher education tax incentives into a single credit

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What should be a higher priority: expanding access to the current system, or reforming it and encouraging alternative options?
- What is the value of higher education?
- What worries you most about our education system? Cost? Control? Performance? Ability to prepare young people for today’s economy?

BECOMING AN INFLUENCER:

- Write op-eds, letters to the editor, and articles for your local newspaper! If you have or will at some point have college-age children, you can draw on your family’s personal experiences to own your expertise and make a compelling case for the higher education reforms needed.
- Write to your elected representatives about proposals and legislation they may have to reform the cost of higher education and alternative models and choices.
  - House Education and the Workforce Committee Members
  - Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Members