



# The Federal Debt

## 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 be prepared to hear a different point of view. Listen first, and focus on the facts.
- **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

*Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief.*

- **Take five minutes** to walk through the 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: facts to share during your discussion

- At the beginning of 2021, [total U.S. debt](#) was approaching \$28 trillion and [total debt-to-GDP ratio](#) has remained above 100% since 2013, meaning the debt is larger than the [U.S. GDP of roughly \\$21.5 trillion](#).
- The OMB calculated that between FY2004 and FY2017, the federal government made [\\$1.2 trillion worth of improper payments](#).
- The CBO estimated that to decrease the debt to below 50% of GDP, [increased revenues and spending cuts](#) would need to total 2.9% of GDP each year. For a middle class family, this could look like an increase in federal taxes of over \$2,000 or decreased Social Security benefits of \$2,800.

## Let's discuss

Below are 3 questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** Is the key to reducing the debt increasing revenue, such as through higher taxes, or more restraint in spending, which could result in program and benefit cuts?
- **Government:** Is there a way to make Congress live within its means and stop wasteful spending?
- **Business:** Federal spending can support businesses, but it also drives up the national debt and makes companies operating in America seem like a risky investment. Is there a way to balance short and long-term consequences?

## Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify how fiscal responsibility is affecting your community. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of budget and tax policies in your community.** Search on your state's website for your local Office of Management and Budget, or search Ballotpedia for your state's [budget policies](#) and [tax policies](#).
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. See if there is an [organization](#) that addresses fiscal responsibility in your state, or find subject matter experts in your community, such as professionals in the financial field or teachers.
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on budget policies and fiscal responsibility, and their vision for how to tackle fiscal challenges in your state or municipality. 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 national and state fiscal responsibility 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:
  - [Free Enterprise](#)
  - [Entitlements](#)
  - [Financial Literacy](#)
- **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.