



THE POLICY  
CIRCLE®

#policynotpolitics

# Poverty

## Discussion Guide

### Let's get started

Each member is invited to give a **two minute reaction** to the brief answering the following questions. 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.

- What lens did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, etc.)?
- What did you find most interesting from reading the brief?
- What do you most care about regarding this issue?

### Let's discuss

- What do you think the role of government should be in addressing poverty?
- What is your role in fighting poverty?
- Do you think our current social welfare system remains true to Thomas Jefferson's sense of government obligation to the poor in the early American era?
- What can we do to reform current anti-poverty programs?
- What is your opinion of the Kemp Forum's proposals for fighting poverty?
- What are other ways we can empower and enable people to achieve upward mobility?

### Let's act

- How does poverty affect our community? Is this an issue we'd like to learn more about? If so, who could serve as point people?
- What organizations, legislators and journalists could we contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged?
- Who can post a meeting recap of this discussion and be a resource to other circles on this issue?

## Key Facts

- U.S. taxpayers have spent \$22 trillion on anti-poverty programs since 1965.
- In 2016 the poverty rate was 12.7%, down from 14.8% in 2014.
- The federal government now operates 122 different anti-poverty programs.
  - There are 33 federal housing programs run by four different cabinet departments.
  - Six federal government cabinet departments and five independent agencies oversaw 27 cash or general assistance programs in 2011.
- In 2008 enrollment in Food Stamps (SNAP) program was below 30 million. In 2015, it was at 46.5 million. In 2016, SNAP cost more than \$66 billion. As of April 2018, food stamp enrollment had dipped slightly, to just over **42 million recipients**.
- There is a large amount of waste and error in the current system
  - Medicaid made \$14.4 billion improper payments in 2013.
  - The Government Accountability Office reports that despite great progress, “the amount of SNAP (food stamps) benefits paid in error is substantial, totaling about \$2.2 billion in 2009,” according to FreedomWorks.
  - Additionally, a report compiled by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated that, “the 18 food assistance programs show signs of program overlap, which can create unnecessary work and lead to inefficient use of resources.”
  - In 2014 the Social Security Administration improperly paid \$5.1 billion in Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Department of Labor improperly paid \$5.6 billion in Unemployment Insurance; IRS improperly paid an estimated \$17.7 billion in Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) payments.
- Administrative costs for SNAP equals about \$5.5 billion per year, or about 10 percent of the value of food stamps distributed.
- In 2016, state and local governments spent \$220 billion on anti-poverty programs including \$48 billion on welfare programs and \$172 billion on Medicaid.  
([FederalSafetyNet.com](http://FederalSafetyNet.com))

## Principles of Reform

- Look for solutions in the community
- Education reform and school choice
- Economic growth must be strong to generate work opportunities
- Programs need to center around the importance of work
- Criminal justice reform and programs to reduce recidivism
- Job training
- Regulatory reform
- Evidence-Based Policy Making: Another step in making government work better for people is analyzing whether or not programs are actually effective.