



# Poverty

## 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

- **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

- U.S. taxpayers have spent [\\$23 trillion on over 100 anti-poverty programs](#) since 1965, but the [percentage of Americans in poverty](#) has not changed much, ranging from about 11% to 15% on average since then.
- [According to 2019 Census Bureau Income and Poverty data](#), the poverty rate for all workers was 4.7% and for full-time, year-round workers was 2%. The poverty rate for those who did not work for at least one week during the year was 26.4%.
- [Expanding access to capital](#) can address poverty by providing new business opportunities; by one estimate, a 1% increase in the rate of new business equates to a 2% decline in poverty rate.

## Let's discuss

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

- **Community:** If federal and state spending and programs have made little progress in the fight against poverty, who is best to tackle the issues? Can community-based initiatives empower and enable people to achieve self-sufficiency?
- **Government:** 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?
- **Business:** Is there a right to a minimum wage? How would this affect businesses' finances?

## Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify how poverty is affecting your community. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of anti-poverty policies in your community.** Search on your state's website for a dropdown menu or tab labelled "community," "family and children," or "public assistance." Alternatively, try searching "government assistance" or "government services" in the search bar. [See how much your state is spending.](#)
3. **Investigate community programs in your state or municipality.** See where [opportunity zones](#) are in your state. Are there [anti-poverty policies](#) that set up committees or task forces? Are there nonprofits or other community groups making an impact locally you could volunteer with or partner with?
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on anti-poverty policies, and their vision for how to tackle the challenges of poverty facing Americans and your community. 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 anti-poverty policies and welfare reform 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](#)
  - [Federal Debt](#)
- **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.