



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 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: 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.
- The federal government spent [\\$847 billion on 13 welfare programs](#) in 2020, amounting to [13% of the federal budget](#).
- [According to 2020 Census Bureau data](#), the poverty rate for all workers increased from 4.7% in 2019 to 5% in 2020, and the poverty rate for those who did not work for at least one week during the year increased from 26.4% in 2019 to 34.7% in 2020.

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 labeled "*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.