



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

*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?

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.

- In your opinion, what is the priority in regards to reducing poverty?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- What do you think the role of government should be in addressing poverty? What is the role of the private citizen and individual communities?
- 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?
- Is there a right to a basic income or minimum wage?
- What are other ways we can empower and enable people to achieve self-sufficiency?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- U.S. taxpayers have spent [\\$23 trillion on over 100 anti-poverty programs](#) since 1965.
- [In 2018, the number of people in poverty](#) was 38.1 million, or 11.8%, down a slight 0.5% from 39.5 million in 2017.
- There are [32 federal housing programs run by five different cabinet departments](#).
- Waste and error in the current system is prevalent:
 - [Medicaid made](#) \$36.2 billion improper payments in 2018.
 - [The amount of SNAP benefits paid in error](#) amounted to about \$4 billion in 2018.
 - [The IRS improperly paid](#) an estimated \$18.4 billion in Earned Income Tax Credit.
- [According to 2017 Census Bureau Income and Poverty data](#), the poverty rate for all workers was 5.3% and for full-time, year-round workers was 2.2%. The poverty rate for those who did not work for at least one week during the year was over 30%.

Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
 - **Research your elected representatives positions** on poverty, and their vision for how to tackle the challenges of poverty facing Americans and your community.
 - Your legislators, state comptroller, attorney general and other local elected officials want to know their constituents. Write to them about your interest in poverty.
 - 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.
 - Research the committees on which your Senators and Representatives serve. Search the Committee websites to investigate your representatives' level of engagement on efforts to address poverty and welfare reform.
 - **Explore the impact of anti-poverty policies in your community.**
 - On your state or municipality website, look 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.
 - [Ballotpedia](#) has economic, social, legal, and demographic information on a state-by-state basis.
 - To research state specific anti-poverty spending, search "*Budget and Finances in [your state]*" in the search bar on the main page.
- *Reach out:*
 - Explore what organizations, legislators, and journalists you could contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged.
 - If you have trouble finding the information you are looking for on your municipality's website, consider contacting agency or department heads. You can find the contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#).
 - The Policy Circle offers a number of resources for engaging on the local level. Learn how to write a letter to the editor on [The Policy Circle website](#).

- 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](#).

Post a Recap/Dive Deeper:

- Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present. 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?
- This brief is part of the Foundational Five [Conversation Series](#). Other briefs in the series include:
 - [Free Enterprise](#)
 - [Entitlements](#)
 - [Federal Debt](#)
- Dive Deeper into this area. 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.