



Civic Engagement

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

- According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, only [39% of Americans](#) can correctly name all three branches of government.
- In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, [voter turnout amounted to 55.7%](#), although preliminary analysis shows [voter turnout in 2020](#) surged to its highest levels in at least four decades.
- Only 20% of Americans express trust in the government, but approximately [56% of Americans](#) believe their communities can come together and solve the country's problems, despite differing political views.

Let's discuss

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

- Why do you feel the U.S. is experiencing declines in civic engagement?
 - What do you feel are the impediments to citizens becoming more involved and affecting change?
- How engaged are you in your community?
 - Do you remember your parents being involved in civic/community groups and organizations when you were young? How would you explain the importance of civic participation to the younger people in your life?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** about civic engagement and community involvement, and what the effects of the presence or absence of these is. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area to boost civic engagement within your networks, neighborhood or city.
2. **Explore the impact of civic engagement in your community.** Read your [State Snapshot](#) on The Policy Circle website. On your state or municipality website, try searching “civic engagement” in the search bar to see what initiatives exist, such as a Citizen Academy in your city. Find out what school civics graduation requirements exist in your state.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Visit [AmeriCorps](#) for opportunities on how to serve your community. Consider [Rutgers University's Political Power Map](#) of partisan and non-partisan, national and state-based organizations that offer political and leadership training.
4. **Research your elected representatives'** positions on civic engagement, and their vision for how to tackle engagement challenges 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 the state of civic engagement 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:
 - [Rebuilding Trust](#)
 - [The U.S. Constitution](#)
 - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
- **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.