



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

*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 active citizenship and civic engagement?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- How would you navigate a conversation on policy issues with someone with whom you disagree?
- 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?
- What steps can you take to become more civically engaged? What is within your comfort level and what would be outside of it?
- How would you explain the importance of civic participation to the younger people in your life, be they children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- The [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement National Task Force](#) found that “withdrawal into comfortable enclaves and wariness of others who are different persist, while public confidence in the nation’s political institutions erodes in a downward trajectory” and reported that “among the 172 world democracies, the U.S. ranks 139th in voter participation.”
- A 2013 federal report [showed](#) “declines in 16 of 20 indicators of civic health, including falling rates of volunteerism and engagement with community organizations and flagging trust in public institutions.”
- The [Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life](#) lists the following five obstacles to civic engagement:
 - Lack of Civility
 - Lack of Attention to Public Affairs
 - Lack of Role Models
 - Lack of Civic and Political Skills
 - Lack of Awareness

Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
 - **Research how active civic engagement affect your community** politically, socially, and economically.
 - Read your State Snapshot on The Policy Circle website in the blue sidebar or by typing [www.thepolicycircle.org/statebrief/\[your state\]/](http://www.thepolicycircle.org/statebrief/[your state]/)
 - On your state or municipality website, try searching “civic engagement” in the search bar.
 - Visit <https://www.nationalservice.gov> for opportunities on how to serve your community.
- *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. Who can 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 Conversation Series:
 - The Foundational Five. Other briefs in the series include:
 - [Free Enterprise](#)
 - [Entitlements](#)
- 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.