



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? Has being a member of the Policy Circle affected your engagement in any way?
- 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 concept of civic duty has been integral to societies since [ancient Rome](#).
- The total number of [worldwide volunteers](#) is close to 1 billion, approximately equivalent to 109 million full-time workers.
- [Volunteers](#) are more likely to volunteer informally (70%) than formally through organizations or associations, and are more likely to be women (57%) than men (43%).
- The [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement National Task Force](#) found that “among the 172 world democracies, the U.S. ranks 139th in voter participation.”
- Voter turnout in the [2016 U.S. presidential election](#) was 55.7%, far behind the highest rates of 87.2% (Belgium) and 82.6% (Sweden).
- 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.”
- Approximately [56% of Americans](#) believe their communities can come together and solve the country's problems, despite differing political views.

Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
 - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on civic engagement, and their vision for how to tackle engagement challenges 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 civic engagement in 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.
 - **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.
 - Visit <https://www.nationalservice.gov> for opportunities on how to serve your community.
 - There are many online and live opportunities to develop the skills necessary for effective engagement. Consider [Rutgers University's Political Power Map](#) of partisan and non-partisan, national and state-based organizations that offer political and leadership training.
- *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 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 Foundational Five [Conversation Series](#): 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.