



# U.S. Senate

## 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: Some Facts to Share with the Group During Your Discussion

- The Senate refers roughly [3,000 bills and resolutions](#) to committees during each two-year congressional session, but only about 500 of these are reported back to the full Senate.
- Senators have been directly elected by their state's voters since the passage of the [17th Amendment in 1913](#).
- The Senate has the [unique responsibilities](#) of conducting impeachment trials and providing advice and consent to confirm treaties and executive and judicial nominations.

## Let's discuss

*Below are 3 questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.*

- **Community:** Because each state has only two senators, does this make these offices more removed from constituents? How does this affect constituents' influence on policy?
- **Local, State, or Federal Government:** What are some advantages and disadvantages to the structure of the Senate? Do you think the structure and process works?
- **Business:** The House of Representatives in particular has the power of the purse, and the Senate's role to review and polish House legislation. How may this affect economic policies and businesses?

## Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify how what happens in Congress affects your community. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of the Senate in your community.** Use [GovTrack](#) to find legislation that affects you, and see how your representatives have voted.
3. **Investigate community programs.** Find the legislative calendar for the Senate [here](#).
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions.** 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 legislation or the operations of the Senate 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:
  - [U.S. House of Representatives](#)
  - [The U.S. Constitution](#)
- **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.