

Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods

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 communities and neighborhoods?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- How are America’s communities and the face of Main Street changing? Have you seen changes in your own neighborhood?
- How do you define the community/neighborhood in which you live or your business operates?
- How do you characterize your neighborhood in terms of beauty, prosperity, and human connectedness? Is there social infrastructure? What works? What is lacking?
- Are you aware of the zoning laws as well as the ordinances and taxes/permits that impact private behavior in your neighborhood?
- Is the digital world impacting personal connections in communities? How might this take away from or add to community engagement?
- Have you voted in your community’s recent local elections?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- People who are socially connected to their communities tend to be [happier, healthier, and live longer](#) than people who are less connected.
- [Across the United States](#), there are approximately 46 million rural counties, 175 million suburban counties, and 98 million urban core counties.
- Young Americans ages 25 -29 are [25% more likely to move](#) from the city to the suburbs than the suburbs to the city.
- Home prices [are rising](#) at twice the rate of wages. Property taxes rose an average of 4 percent across the U.S. in 2018, bringing the average to almost \$3500.
- [Some estimates show](#) the U.S. economy as a whole is 14% smaller due to constraints such as zoning.
- [Small businesses](#) (defined as 500 employees or fewer) made up 99.9 percent of all businesses in the U.S. in 2018 and employed 47.5 percent of U.S. employees, about 60 million people.
- In the last 15 years, “[news deserts](#)” have been on the rise: 1,800 newspapers have disappeared, and those that continue printing have lost more than half of their journalists.

Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
 - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on matters affecting communities and the face of Main Street, and their vision for how to tackle the 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 your community and neighborhoods.
 - 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 policies in your community.**
 - On your state or municipality website, look for a “government” or “departments” drop-down tab to learn about your elected officials and see who is on important township boards and committees.
 - Alternatively, try searching “*taxes*,” “*economic development*,” or “*community development*” in the search bar.
 - Consider asking local business owners or your local Chamber of Commerce about economic effects such as zoning. You can find your local Chamber of Commerce [here](#).
 - Look into integration efforts and how newcomers are welcomed into the neighborhood. Who encourages them to vote locally and engage?
 - On your state or municipality website, see what kinds of state or township services are offered, and if there is a need in 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. 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 Five for Business and Five for Communities [Conversation Series](#). Other briefs in these series include:
 - [Government Regulation](#)
 - [Taxes](#)
 - [Housing](#)
 - [Aging in the 21st Century](#)
- 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.