

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

- **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: facts to share during your discussion

- At the turn of the century, around 600,000 new businesses opened every year; since the Great Recession from 2007-2009, [that number](#) has been cut down to about 400,000. A report from the Federal Reserve determined "around [200,000 more U.S. businesses permanently closed](#) as a result of the pandemic than in a typical year."
- According to the most [recent data](#), from 2019, 30.8% of state and local government expenditures went to elementary, secondary, and higher education; 22.4% to public welfare programs such as Medicaid; and 9.6% to public health and hospitals.
- Local regulations, which have grown by 50% over the past 50 years, [have dampened the U.S. economy as a whole by 9%](#). Strict housing regulations, particularly in high-wage cities, have resulted in a \$1.4 trillion loss in GDP - the equivalent of New York's GDP.

Let's discuss

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

- **Community:** How do you define the community/neighborhood in which you live or your business operates?
 - Is there social infrastructure? Is the digital world impacting connections?
- **Government:** Policies at the local level have the most direct effects on our lives. Is there a way to increase voter turnout for local elections?
- **Business:** How do zoning laws, ordinances, and taxes or permits impact small businesses in your neighborhood?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** - introduce yourself and start a conversation about the community to build trust and common ground. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of local ordinances and regulations in your community.** Search on your state's website for your local economic development and business committees. Consider [what it would be like to start a business in your area](#).
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. You can find your local Chamber of Commerce [here](#).
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on regulations and community development, and their vision for how to tackle 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 zoning ordinances, social infrastructure, or the needs of small businesses 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:
 - [Government Regulation](#)
 - [Taxes](#)
 - [Housing](#)
 - [Aging in the 21st Century](#)
- **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.