

# 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.