



Campaign Finance

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 campaign finance?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- What is the purpose of money in politics? Does money matter in political campaigns?
- How do campaign finance laws affect our community?
- What is the balance between protecting against corruption and ensuring people have the unhindered ability to participate in political campaigns?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- In the 1896 presidential race, [William McKinley is said to have raised and spent](#) between \$6 and \$7 million dollars (over \$180 million [today](#)).
- In 2016, [labor unions contributed over \\$217 million](#) to political campaigns.
- [Once an individual has raised or spent more than \\$5,000](#), he or she must register with the Federal FEC as a candidate and transfer funds into a campaign account, whose funds will be disclosed.
- The [share of women](#) giving at least \$200 to political campaigns rose to over 43% during the 2020 election cycle after never rising higher than 28% during the 1990s.
- [Political ad spending](#) rose by \$1 billion between 2008 and 2012, and by \$2 billion between 2012 and 2016, reaching almost \$9 billion in 2018.
- 501(c)s only account for [a small slice of political spending](#), 5% in 2012 and 3% in 2016.

Engage Locally

- *Learn more*
 - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on campaign finance, 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 elections.
 - 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 campaign finance laws in your community.**
 - Search on your state or municipality's website for your *Election Division* or *Division of Elections*, usually under the Secretary of State or Department of State
 - You can also search for campaign finance laws in your state with [Ballotpedia's map](#) and [Campaign Finance Institute's State Law Database](#).
- *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 Active Citizenship [Conversation Series](#). Other briefs in these series include:
 - [Election Integrity](#)
 - [Elections: Assessing Candidates](#)
 - [U.S. Senate](#)
 - [U.S. House of Representatives](#)
 - [Free Speech](#)
- 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.