



Rebuilding Trust in America

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 listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **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

- Since 2007, [fewer than 30% of Americans](#) have said they can trust the federal government at least "most of the time." The [2021 Gallup Confidence in Institutions survey](#) marked the 15th consecutive year that Congress is the lowest-ranked institution amongst Americans.
- In June 2021, [PEW Research reported](#) 58% of U.S. adults say they have at least some trust in information that comes from national news organizations. This is the smallest share over the past 5 years of asking the question.
- [Almost 70% of Americans](#) do not trust social media companies to determine which posts on their sites should be labeled as inaccurate. Between August 2019 and January 2021, the percentage of Americans who want more government regulation of Big Tech companies rose from [48% to 57%](#).
- Approximately 37% of Americans believe "most people can be trusted," and 62% say people "need to be very careful" around others, according to the [World Values Survey](#).

Let's discuss

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

- **Community:** Do you see or have you experienced trust gaps in your own community? How would you address these gaps as a citizen and/or as a business-owner?
- **Poll Question:** How much confidence do you have in societal institutions, such as government, media, law enforcement, and businesses?
 - Share a number from 1 to 10, or list these institutions in order of trustworthiness
 - Has your confidence in these institutions changed over time?
 - What would these institutions need to do to earn your trust?

Let's act

1. **Take it local.** Building trust starts with having important conversations, so talk to your neighbors about how trust and mistrust is affecting your community. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of mistrust on public policy in your community.** Search for your state laws on [Ballotpedia](#), or on your state's website for agencies, departments, or webpages to identify heads of agencies and other leaders in your community. Determine how easily accessible leaders are or how transparent policies and organizations are.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Talk to local civics organizations about programs they offer and challenges they face.
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on important public policies and transparency, 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 state of trust and mistrust in American or your community 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:
 - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
 - [Civic Engagement](#)
 - [Free Speech](#)
- **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.