



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

*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 resolving issues of mistrust in the U.S.?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- What do you believe are the primary reasons for declining trust in America?
- How much confidence do you have in societal institutions, such as the government, media, and law enforcement?
 - 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?
- How much confidence do you have in individuals and communities?
 - Do you see or have you experienced trust gaps in your own community? How would you address these gaps?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- Between 2007 and 2019, [fewer than 30% of Americans](#) have said they can trust the federal government, a drop from the [75% of Americans](#) who demonstrated trust in the federal government in 1958.
- [As of 2020](#), 75% of U.S. adults trust small businesses, while 19% of Americans say they trust big businesses.
- [Confidence in the police fell to 48%](#) in August 2020, “marking the first time in the 27 year trend that this reading is below the majority level.”
- [In 2017](#), 80% of U.S. adults expressed trust in scientists to provide accurate and reliable information, but over 70% also said they are concerned scientific findings are influenced by sponsoring companies or organizations.
- [Only 32% Americans](#) expressed a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media in 2016, down from 54% in 2003.
- 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](#).

Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
 - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on important public policies, 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 public policy. These points of contact are key to building trust with local elected officials.
 - 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 trust in your community.**
 - Search on your state's website for agencies, departments, or webpages relating to see how transparent your state's policies are.
 - Talk to local business owners, entrepreneurs, journalists, or academics to share and hear each others' experiences and understandings of trust and mistrust 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](#).

Take Action/Dive Deeper

- What is the one thing you are going to do following this meeting?
- Consider possible next steps, such as:
 - Inviting a local expert or representative to your next meeting
 - Organizing a broader, community-wide conversation
 - Finding allies to take this on as an issue to pursue
- Don't forget to summarize your discussion and post a meeting recap on your circle page to share thoughts with members not present.
- Decide your next meeting topic. See The Policy Circle's [How to Choose A Policy Circle Brief](#) for topics to explore so you can continue to hold complex conversations and foster open dialogue.
- 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.