



Transparency & Accountability

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.*

- **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

- In 2019, the 20 largest federal agencies reported [\\$175 billion improper payments](#), an average of \$14.6 billion per month. Only \$21 billion of that was recaptured.
- In 2020, the [federal government awarded](#) almost \$500 million in pandemic response contracts to companies that had been accused of defrauding taxpayers and \$9.4 billion in pandemic contracts had not been competitively awarded.
- In one survey asking why minority-owned businesses [did not submit bids for government contracts](#), over half believed they did not have the right contracts and it was a closed network, 49% said they could not access information, and almost one-third said they perceived the process to be unfair.

Let's discuss

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

- **Community:** From the perspective of the general public, is there a culture of secrecy surrounding government and its actions? What right do taxpayers have to know the details of government spending at the federal, state and local level?
- **Government:** [Sen. Chuck Grassley said](#), “We shouldn’t have to rely solely on good citizens to provide oversight for huge federal contracts.” What steps should government take to provide oversight for itself?
- **Business:** Do economic incentives for large corporations have a positive effect on the local economy? How do these affect the job market, economic growth, and small businesses?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Consider hosting another conversation** with neighbors to identify how transparency and accountability is affecting your community.
2. **Explore the impact of freedom of information laws in your community.** Search on your state’s website for an office of transparency, or visit the National Freedom of Information Coalition to [see your state’s laws](#).
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. See if there is a local organization or watchdog agency. Get in touch with local journalists to see if anyone is keeping track of government transparency and accountability.
4. **Research your elected representatives’ positions** on transparency and accountability, and their vision for how to tackle these challenges in your state or municipality. 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 transparency and accountability 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:
 - [Federal Debt](#)
 - [Civic Engagement](#)
 - [Government, Community, and Sports Teams: Tax Credits](#)
- **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.