

Strategic Giving & Civic Engagement

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 walk through 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)?
 - Is giving your time and/or money to nonprofits a priority? If yes, what is the primary focus of your giving?

Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- Analysis of IRS tax data of 128 million U.S. households found charitable giving rose from \$448 billion in 2019 to [\\$471 billion in 2020](#). The largest source of charitable giving ([\\$324.1 billion](#), or 69% of total giving) was individuals.
- An estimated [77 million Americans volunteered](#) about 7 billion hours of time valued at approximately \$167 billion in 2020.
- There are approximately [1.5 million registered nonprofit organizations](#) in the U.S., including an "estimated [87,000 grant-making private foundations](#) that control more than \$1 trillion in wealth and direct it independent of government."

Let's discuss

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

- What are the areas of greatest need in your community? Are there organizations that exist to address these needs?
- Do you know if the organizations that you give to have a 501(c)(4) arm or a lobbying component? If so, what policies are the organizations you support lobbying for?
- Do you value donor privacy? Why?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** about civic engagement and community involvement, and what the effects of the presence or absence of these are.
2. **Explore the impact of philanthropy and civic engagement in your community.** Read your [State Snapshot](#) on The Policy Circle website. See [your state's volunteering highlights](#) from AmeriCorps.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Visit [AmeriCorps](#) for opportunities on how to serve your community. Consider what the areas of greatest need are in your community.
4. **Research your elected representatives'** positions on philanthropy and related considerations such as donor privacy, and their vision for how to tackle engagement 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 philanthropy, volunteering, and giving back 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:
 - [Rebuilding Trust](#)
 - [Civic Engagement](#)
 - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
- **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.