

Veterans

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](#) and walk through the 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

- There are an estimated [18-20 million American veterans](#) (about 7% of the U.S. population). Between 2000 and 2018, the veteran population declined by a third, from 26.4 million to 18 million.
- In a [2021 study from the Bush Center](#), 53% of post-9/11 veterans reported physical health conditions, with chronic pain (41%) and sleep problems (31%) the most cited.
- The [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) (VA) oversees the largest integrated health care system in the United States., serving 9.2 million veterans, and provides disability compensation for over 6 million veterans and their survivors.

Let's discuss

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

- **Community:** What are the needs of veterans in your community? Are there opportunities to get involved, either in promoting veteran-owned businesses or assisting with programs focused on health and financial stability?
- **Government:** The VA maintains a [list](#) of local service providers in communities. Can you see their presence in your community? Do you think they are adequately serving the needs of veterans in your community? In what ways is the VA successful and in what ways do you think it is falling short?
- **Business:** Several private-sector organizations focus on assisting veterans, with work in healthcare, homelessness and job training . In what ways can you get involved with these organizations?

Let's act

1. **Take it local.** Talk to neighbors, friends, and family who have military experience or a family member who served. Ask how you can support them. Consider hosting another conversation with these community members.
2. **Explore legislation related to veterans in your community.** On your state's or municipality's website you can find information related to veterans in your community. You can search the departments, agencies, and programs related to these areas on your municipality's or state's website. Try using search words such as "armed forces" or "veterans" in the search bar. These options may also be available in a dropdown menu.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Find state departments of Veterans Affairs [here](#).
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on veterans, and their vision for how to tackle challenges facing veterans. 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 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:
 - [Financial Literacy](#)
 - [Healthcare](#)
 - [Mental Health](#)
- **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.