



Affirmative Action

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?

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share with the Group During Your Discussion

- With a landmark ruling of 6-2 in the *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and a ruling of 6-3 in *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina*, the Supreme Court rejected the use of race in college admissions processes.

- Polls and a [Pew Study](#) show Black adults express more support than opposition to affirmative action practices, with 47% approving and 29% disapproving. About a quarter of Black adults (24%) say they are not sure.
- According to a December 2022 Pew Research Center Survey, of the participants that recognized the phrase affirmative action ([79%](#)), only [29% said it is a bad thing](#).
- Affirmative Action has been around in some sense or another since the 1960's. It takes the shape of the Equal [Employment Opportunities Commission](#), [The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs](#), [Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights](#), and other DEI programs.
- 63% of U.S. adults support leaving race out of college admissions processes, however [64% of Americans](#) do agree that increasing diversity within universities and colleges is positive.
- Ahead of the June 2023 Supreme Court ruling, [nine states had already banned affirmative action](#), with one state (Texas) reversing the banned measures and another (Colorado) failing to pass the measures.
- In a study analyzing [Executive Order 11246](#), an affirmative action policy focused on employment and, more specifically, the targeting of firms holding contracts with the federal government, researchers found the affirmative action policy to be ineffective.
- In a Pew Research Survey, [74%](#) of U.S. adults shared that companies and organizations should only take a person's qualifications into account, "[even if it results in less diversity](#)."
- Affirmative action can help foster a more diverse and inclusive workforce or educational environment. It [aims to provide representation for historically underrepresented groups](#), giving them access to opportunities that were previously limited due to systemic biases and discrimination.
- Race-based selection can be perceived as [unfair and inconsistent](#) with the principle of equal opportunity.

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss them, or choose your own.

["Christopher Edley, the White House assistant put in charge of President Clinton's review of affirmative action policy in 1994-95, speaks of how, during the long sessions he and his co-workers put in around the conference table, the discussion of affirmative action kept circling back to the "coal miner's son" question;"](#)

- ["Imagine a college admissions committee trying to decide between the white \[son\] of an Appalachian coal miner's family and the African American son of a successful Pittsburgh neurosurgeon. Why should the black applicant get preference over the white applicant?" \(Edley 1996, 132ff\)](#)
- Do you see ways that you can promote equal opportunity and access in your community? Do the benefits of affirmative action outweigh their consequences?
- How can colleges, universities, and employers embrace the benefits of a diverse student population or workforce in fair and transparent ways?

- How does affirmative action affect the concept of meritocracy? Can it be seen as a necessary step toward achieving a more just and inclusive society, or does it undermine the principles of equality and individual achievement?
- Can alternative approaches, such as socioeconomic-based affirmative action or race-blind policies, effectively address issues of inequality without raising the same controversies as race-conscious affirmative action? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these alternatives?

Let's act

1. **Measure:** Are you familiar with the admission process of colleges and universities within your state or county? Do you know your state's history with affirmative action? Were colleges in your state already banned from using race and ethnicity in applications, or will the verdict of the Supreme Court alter the admissions process?
2. **Identify:** Who are the influencers in your state, county, or community? Learn about their priorities and consider how to contact them, including [elected officials](#), attorneys general, law enforcement, boards of education, city councils, journalists, media outlets, community organizations, and local businesses. What steps have your state's or community's elected or appointed officials taken in response to the Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action? Discover how colleges, universities, and employers adjust their policies to offer diversity and equal opportunity.
3. **Reach Out:** Find allies in your community or in nearby towns and elsewhere in the state. Foster collaborative relationships with community organizations, school boards and related organizations such as PTAs, your local chamber of commerce or local businesses.
4. **Plan:** Set milestones based on your state's legislative calendar or local community calendar.
5. **Execute:** As the Supreme Court will play a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of future affirmative action policies, stay updated on any rulings or cases brought to the Court associated with racial classifications, college admissions, or equal opportunity. Look into education governance and the committees that set goals and visions, such your state's Higher Education Board or local institutions' boards of trustees.
6. **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](#).
7. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on new innovative practices in education 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:

- [Crime & Safety](#)
- [Literacy in America](#)
- [Foster Care](#)
- **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.