U.S. Policy In Post-War Iraq: What Should We Do?

A guide for public dialogue and problem solving

Single-Session Guide Version 2.0
Using this single-session guide

We've developed this single-session discussion guide for people who want to bring groups together for short conversations about the issues related to the current worldwide conversation regarding Iraq.

This single-session guide has six parts, with recommended times for each. The entire discussion will take two and a half hours.

In Parts 4 and 5, you will be directed to refer to a discussion of policy options developed by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program* at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies. This material can be downloaded from www.choices.edu/post_war_iraq.cfm.

We believe that participants will find it helpful to read through the Choices policy options before they come to the study circle. However, everyone should be welcome to join the conversation, if they have read the Choices material, or not.

Permissions Policy:
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*The Choices Program, www.choices.edu, develops curricula for the secondary classroom on a wide range of current and historical international issues, and offers workshops, institutes and in-service programs for high school teachers. These curricular materials place a special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.
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**U.S. Policy Toward Iraq: What Should We Do?**

*Single-Session Guide Version 1.0*

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U.S. Policy Toward Iraq:
What Should We Do?

A single-session discussion guide

Part 1: Getting to know each other
(20 minutes)

Here are some questions to get you started. Your facilitator will guide you.

A. Who are you? Tell people a little about yourself.
B. Why are you here today? What do you hope to get from this study circle discussion?

Part 2: Setting the ground rules
(10 minutes)

We need to agree on the rules about how to talk with and listen to one another. They will help our study circle work better. Here are some ideas.

- Listen carefully and with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don’t cut people off.
- Speak for yourself, and not as the representative of any group. Remember that others are speaking for themselves, too.
- If something someone says hurts or bothers you, say so, and say why.
- It’s OK to disagree, but be sure to show respect for one another.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.
- Some of the things we will say in the study circle will be personal. Unless we all say it is OK, we will not talk about each other’s stories outside this group.

Facilitator Tips

- This discussion is divided into six parts. Please use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Welcome everyone and explain your role as a neutral facilitator.
- Help everyone feel welcome. Be sure each person has a chance to speak and to hear the other group members.
- Have someone record the general ideas that come up in this session on large sheets of paper so that everyone can see them.
Part 3: Sharing our concerns and our hopes
(20 minutes)

Many people have concerns about the issues that have been raised as the U.S. considers its actions in post-war Iraq, and its responsibilities as a world power. Many of us have hopes about what a productive outcome might look like. Talking about our hopes and concerns will help us understand one another and the issues. That is our goal in this part of the session.

Think about your greatest concerns, and about your hopes for positive outcomes. Share them with the group. Have a volunteer take notes on big sheets of paper.

Below are a few ideas to help us get started. These are just discussion starters. Feel free to add ideas that are not listed here. As you talk about your concerns, keep in mind “Questions to think about” in the box below.

Sample Concerns to help start your conversation

- Security at home (how to make sure we are safe as individuals, and as a nation)
- Relationship of the U.S. to the rest of the world
- The situation in the Middle East (how to make sure things do not get worse)
- Terrorism—how does it connect with the situation in the Middle East?

Sample Hopes to help start your conversation

- A secure world, free of weapons of mass destruction
- Liberty and democracy spreading around the world
- A global commitment to peace, and to working together to reach that goal
- A continued role for U.S. leadership in the world.

Questions to think about:

- What are your personal concerns and hopes?
- What is your greatest concern at this time?
- Why is that important to you?
- What do you think is really going on?
Part 4: What values and beliefs are important to us?
(30 minutes)

As we think about how to address our concerns, and how to reach for our hopes, we find ourselves thinking about our values—the things that are important to us—and our beliefs about how the world works.

In this part, we will think about and share with each other some of our values and beliefs. This will help us in Part 5, where we will talk about specific policy options.

A. (10 minutes) Take a few minutes to look at the following four statements. How do they relate to your own values and beliefs? Under each pair of ideas, put a check in the circle that shows how you feel.

Facilitator Tips
• Ask the group members to do this exercise quietly, on their own.
• After everyone is finished, go to Part 4-B on the next page and ask people to share their ideas.

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<th>War is a useful way to deal with possible threats</th>
<th>War is a last resort for dealing with possible threats.</th>
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<th>The U.S. is better off if we work with the rest of the world when we make decisions that affect the rest of the world.</th>
<th>The U.S. is better off if we make decisions about the rest of the world on our own.</th>
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Sometimes, in order to defend our country, we might need to attack another country before they attack us. It is OK to defend ourselves if we are attacked. But if we say it is OK to "strike first," then other nations or groups might decide that it is OK for them to strike first, too. This could lead to more violence, not less violence.

The best way to keep the U.S. safe is to keep the world at peace. We can do this by working together to settle our differences and address common concerns. Good fences make good neighbors. The best way to keep the U.S. safe is to be sure that we are strong enough to fight off anyone who might try to attack us.

Facilitator Tips

- Be sure everyone has a chance to share their thoughts.
- There may not be time to use all the “Questions to think about.” That is fine. Pick the ones that seem most helpful for your group.

B. (20 minutes) Share your values and beliefs with the group. Use the “Questions to think about” to guide you.

Questions to think about:

- When you did the exercise in Part 4-A, was it difficult to decide how you feel? If so, why?
- As you think about this issue, what other values and beliefs are important to you?
- Talk about why your values and beliefs are important to you.
- Why are others’ values and beliefs important to them?
- What have you learned from this discussion about how you feel, and about how others feel?
Part 5: Discussing policy options: How should we address our concerns, and reach for our hopes?
(50 minutes)

Based on the concerns, hopes, values, and beliefs that we have shared, what do you believe that our country should do at this time?
In this part, we will think about policy options for the United States. We will start by talking about policy options that were developed by the Choices Program. Next, we will add our own ideas.

A. Getting Started: the Choices policy options.
(30 minutes)

To get started, we will look at a framework of contrasting policy options, developed by the Choices Program. The Choices options are written in stark terms to help make the differences between them clear, and to help us think through some of the trade-offs involved in different approaches. (See “Using this single-session guide” on page 1 for more information about the Choices Program.)

1. Tape some big sheets of paper on the wall.

2. Ask a volunteer to read parts of Option 1 from the Choices material. Read just the title of the option, and the section called “Underlying Beliefs.”

3. On one of the sheets of paper, another volunteer can write the title of the option, and sum up the main ideas.

4. Do the same things with the other three options in the Choices material. Use a different sheet of paper for each option.

5. Now, spend 5 to 10 minutes talking about each of the options. Use the “Questions to think about” on the next page to guide your discussion.
Questions to think about:

- Which views are closest to your own? Why? How have your own experiences helped to shape your views?
- Think about a view that you support. What would it look like if we acted according to that viewpoint?
- Think about a view you don’t agree with. What might lead someone else to see things that way? What would it look like if we acted according to that viewpoint?
- What should our long-term goals be?
- What steps should we take now and for the future?
- What challenges will these steps present?
- As we think about policy options, what values are important to us?
- What values or beliefs is each option based on?
- What are the pros and cons of each option?
- In what ways do we agree? In what ways do we see things differently?

2. Adding your own policy options
(20 minutes)

What do you think the U.S. should do? Your ideas might be the same as—or different from—the policy options we just discussed. Share your ideas.

a. Have a volunteer take notes on big sheets of paper.

b. How do your values and beliefs shape your ideas?

c. Use the “Questions to think about” (above) to move the discussion along.
Part 6: What can we do?  
(20 minutes)

Many of us want to know what we can do to help our ideas have an impact in the national, and worldwide conversation on this issue.

Each of us would like our ideas to be heard by decision makers. We can help each other to be heard even when we disagree about the policies we would like to put in place.

Talk about how you can get decision makers to hear your ideas. You can develop plans to do some things on your own, and some things with other people.

Have a volunteer take notes on big sheets of paper. Here are some possibilities to get you started:

- **Write an op-ed for the newspaper.** This could be a summary of our study circle conversation, showing several different policy ideas, and the pros and cons of each one.

- **Call or write the White House to register your opinion.** The phone number is (202)456-6213. The email address is president@whitehouse.gov. The postal address is The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.

- **Call or write your Senators and Representative to register your ideas.** You can find contact information at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

- **Be an informed voter.** Learn about your elected officials—both local and national leaders.

- **Learn about the countries of the Middle East.**

- **Hold more study circles.** Be sure to invite people of many different ethnicities and viewpoints. Learn from each other.

- **Ask our political representatives to meet with our community to hear what we are thinking.**
Appendix A: Tips for Study Circle Facilitators

As a study circle facilitator, you do not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. The important thing is to be well prepared for the discussion. This means you will need to...

- understand the goals of the study circle;
- be familiar with the discussion materials;
- think ahead of time about how the discussion might go;
- prepare questions to help the group think deeply about the subject.

In some sessions, you might find that there is more to talk about than you can cover in two hours. Choose what you think will be most interesting to your group. (Your group might want to consider having extra meetings.)

Stay neutral!

It is most important to remember that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

Set a relaxed and open tone.

- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
- People enjoy well-placed humor.

Explain the purpose of the study circle, and help the group set ground rules.

At the beginning of the study circle, remind everyone that the purpose of the study circle is to work with one another to look at the issue in a democratic way. Remind them that your role is to facilitate their discussion. You are not an “expert.” Make it clear that you will not take sides in the discussion. Your job is to keep the discussion focused and make sure the group follows the ground rules.

Suggest the basic ground rules listed in Part 2, then ask people to add their own ideas.
Stay aware of, and assist the group process.

- In addition to keeping the group focused on the content of the discussion, your job is to keep track of how people are communicating. Some people talk a lot. Others tend to be quiet. Be aware of this, and make sure everyone has a chance to speak.

- Consider splitting up into smaller groups to look at different viewpoints. This gives people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue.

- Try not to interfere with the discussion unless you have to. Don’t allow the group to turn to you for the answers.

- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let people respond directly to each other. The most effective facilitators often say little, but are constantly thinking about how to move the discussion forward.

- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.

- Don’t be afraid of silence. People sometimes need time to think before they respond. If silence is hard for you, try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.

- Remember that a study circle is not a debate, but a group dialogue. If the group forgets this, remind them of the ground rules.

- Keep careful track of time!

Help the group look at various points of view.

- Make it clear to people that you will never take sides on the issue. Your role as a facilitator is to keep group members focused on their own thinking.

- Use this discussion guide to help everyone consider a wide range of views. Rather than presenting something as your idea, refer to the guide. This will help you stay neutral. You might ask the group to consider a point of view that hasn’t come up in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the pros and cons of each view.

- Ask people to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- Don’t allow the group to focus on just one point, or one person’s story.

- Help people find common ground, but don’t try to force agreement.

Ask open-ended questions that don’t lend themselves to easy answers.

Open-ended questions are questions that can’t be answered with a quick “yes” or “no.” They push people to think about why they believe what they do. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections among ideas.

Examples:

- What seems to be the key point here?

- Do you agree with that? Why?

- What do other people think of this idea?

- What would be a strong case against what you just said?

- Have you had any experiences with this that you can share with the group?

- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?

- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?

- How might others see this issue?

- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why? Why not?

- How does this make you feel?

Questions to use when people disagree:

- What do you think she or he is saying?

- What bothers you most about this?

- What is at the heart of the disagreement?

- How does this make you feel?

- What might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
• What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
• What is blocking the discussion?
• What might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
• What don’t you agree with?
• What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
• What is it about that position that doesn’t work for you?
• Could you say more about what you think?
• What have we missed that we need to talk about?

Questions to use when people are feeling discouraged:
• Say a little about how that makes you feel.
• Where can you find some hope?
• Can the problems you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

Closing questions:
• Where did we agree and disagree today?
• What have you heard today that has made you think? What has touched you?

Be aware of how people from different cultures communicate.

• When issues of race and culture are a part of the conversation, be ready to address the kinds of things that might come up.
• Even though some of the conversation may revolve around differences, set a tone of unity in the group. Yes, there are differences, but we have enough in common as human beings to allow us to talk together in a constructive way.
• Having two facilitators is often helpful. This sets an example of unity. The co-facilitators could be a man and a woman, a white person and a person of color, an adult and a young person, a manager and a worker. (If some facilitators are newly trained, team them with people who have experience with cross-cultural issues in study circles.)
• Sensitivity, empathy, and familiarity with people of different backgrounds are important qualities for the facilitator. If you have not spent much time with people from other cultures, get involved in a local community program that helps you do this.

• Help people appreciate and respect their own and others’ communication styles. How people were raised affects how they communicate. For example, in some cultures, people are raised to take charge and say exactly what they think. In other cultures, people are expected to be more reserved and keep their thoughts to themselves. Some cultures value listening more than speaking. In others, taking a stand is very important. Point out to the group that there is more than one good way to communicate. Understanding one another takes practice! Use your leadership to show that each person has an important contribution to make to the group.

• Talk about how cultural labels, or stereotypes, are unfair.

• Remind the group, if necessary, that no one can speak for his or her entire culture. Each person’s experiences, as an individual and as a member of a group, are different.

• Urge group members to talk about themselves and their own cultures, rather than other people’s. This way, they will be less likely to make false generalizations about other cultures. Also, listening to others tell their stories will help break down stereotypes and build understanding.
Note-taking Tips

*Note taking serves many purposes:*

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the circles in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.

*How to do it:*

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible.
- Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Some groups organize their records this way:
  - Areas where we agree
  - Areas where we disagree
  - Areas that are mixed
  - Action ideas
- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- People should talk to each other, not to the note taker.

*Close with a summary of the discussion; provide time for evaluation, and set the stage for the next meeting:*

- Give participants a chance to talk about the most important thing they got out of the discussion. You may wish to ask participants to share any new ideas or thoughts they’ve had as a result of the discussion.
- If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the subject and readings for the next session.
- If the groups are meeting because they hope to have an impact on community decision making, be sure to document the content of the discussions.
- After the last session, provide some time for the group to fill out an evaluation. This allows participants to comment on the process and give feedback to the facilitator.
- Thank everyone for his or her contributions!
Appendix B

Face-to-face Dialogue and the Study Circles Resource Center

Public, face-to-face deliberation has always been at the heart of American democracy. In 1989, the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation, created the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) to help all kinds of people engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical social and political issues. Since then, SCRC has worked with hundreds of communities, on many different issues.

SCRC draws its name from the “home study circles” of the late nineteenth century, sponsored by the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in New York. Those circles provided adult education through small-group discussion. SCRC has taken the idea of small-group, face-to-face discussion, and adapted it to provide a means of structuring diverse, large-scale participation in democratic dialogue. These circles offer participants the opportunity not only to discuss critical social and political issues, but also to take action and create change on those issues. Central to SCRC’s approach is the belief that everyone should have a voice in our democracy and in solving public problems. We support communities in discovering the value of inclusive democratic dialogue, and in developing the skills to be able to make this kind of exchange an ongoing part of community life.

To fulfill its mission, SCRC has developed a process known as “community-wide study circles,” to bring large numbers of people together for creative community change. In these programs, large numbers of people from all parts of the community meet in small, diverse groups to talk about a particular issue. These study circle programs lead to a wide range of action efforts.

SCRC publishes discussion guides on a wide range of issues. We can also help you organize study circles in your community:
- providing advice on organizing and facilitating study circles;
- helping develop strong, diverse organizing coalitions;
- teaching how to develop or customize discussion guides;
- explaining how to set program goals and assess progress;
- helping communities connect dialogue to action and change.

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