



GREAT DECISIONS IN THE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: Getting Started

PART II: Creating Your Discussion Group

PART III: Materials for Your Discussion Group

PART IV: Promoting Your Group

PART V: Running Your Discussion Group

PART VII: *About Great Decisions*

Great Decisions is America's largest discussion program on world affairs. The name is shared by a national civic-education program, briefing book, teacher's guide and PBS television series produced by the Foreign Policy Association. The *Great Decisions* program highlights eight critical foreign policy challenges facing Americans each year. In *Great Decisions* Discussion Groups across the country, participants discuss and debate each issue and complete a national opinion ballot to communicate their views to Congress and the White House. Supported by the Foreign Policy Association for over 50 years, *Great Decisions* involves citizens in the foreign policy making process.

There are countless benefits to having *Great Decisions* in your retirement community, but here are a few. *Great Decisions*:

- Informs residents about world affairs.
- Promotes civic participation through the [National Opinion Ballot Report](#), an annual report compiled from *Great Decisions* participants' views on the eight
- Provides residents an opportunity to exchange views and socialize with peers.
- Provides a framework for community discussion while encouraging understanding of alternative views.
- Gives residents the opportunity to think critically about global issues.

PART I: GETTING STARTED

Great Decisions can be implemented in retirement communities as a lecture and/or discussion series for residential community members.

LEADERSHIP

Each group needs a discussion leader(s) and a coordinator. The discussion leader(s) will facilitate discussions during group meetings. The coordinator will be responsible for obtaining a location and materials, planning and promotion. These coordinators are usually the director of activities.

For more on what makes a good discussion leader(s) and coordinator, read the “Group Leaders” section in Part II of this guide.

VENUE

Most retirement communities end up hosting *Great Decisions* groups on site.

Before choosing where you intend to host your discussion, read the “Venue Qualities” section in Part II to determine if your venue is ideal for your group’s meetings.

MATERIALS

All discussion group participants should have individual copies of the [Great Decisions briefing book](#) and all groups should have at least one copy of the [Great Decisions in Foreign Policy series on PBS DVD](#). Coordinators can either purchase books online to sell to participants or provide participants with the information to purchase the books on their own. The Foreign Policy Association also provides free additional materials online at www.GreatDecisions.org, including a monthly e-newsletter, [blogs](#) and more.

All materials are available at www.GreatDecisions.org.

PART II: CREATING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

PLANNING A DISCUSSION GROUP

After you've determined your program goals, it's time to begin the planning process. Here's a list of required and recommended practices:

Required:

- Register your group on www.fpa.org;
- Prepare a program budget;
- Recruit a discussion leader and coordinator;
- Select program dates and times;
- Reserve a meeting space;
- Finalize a promotion plan;
- Identify participants;
- Publicize discussion group;
- Distribute program materials;
- Conduct, collect and submit the National Opinion Ballot Report.

Recommended:

- Reach out to potential program partners;
- Apply for funding;
- Contact potential sponsors and apply for matching funding if you receive a grant;
- Alert staff, congregation, and major donors about the *Great Decisions* group;
- Purchase a couple extra books for attendees who may be unable to afford them;
- Distribute promotional material to program partners;
- Order food and refreshments;
- Track participants through a sign up system;
- Send email reminders to registrants both weeks and days before each session;
- Confirm with speakers and partner organizations right before session.

You may not need to do all of these steps, or you may need to add to it. Tailor the list to your community's needs.

REGISTER YOUR GROUP

Once you've determined the nuts and bolts of your group, [register](http://www.GreatDecisions.org) your group on www.GreatDecisions.org.

PART II: CREATING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

VENUE QUALITIES

Each discussion group is unique, but a good discussion group leader should ask some key questions when trying to find a space where the discussion group will be held. One might consider a few basics:

- Does the meeting space have enough room for all participants to sit comfortably?
- Does the space enable discussion — that is, can participants easily see and hear each other?
- Does the meeting space have an audio/visual capacity so groups can make use of the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* television series?
- Is the meeting space free of noise and distractions?

GROUP LEADERS

Discussion Leaders

The discussion group leader's primary role is to act as a moderator. Discussion group leaders need not be experts on the topic of the discussion. The measure of a good discussion leader lies not in how much knowledge she or he possesses, but in the ability to draw the most out of each participant, and to keep the discussion fair and informative. To this end, the discussion leader's role should focus on three basic elements:

- Determining the format and duration of the meeting in cooperation with the coordinator
- Preparing key points for discussion
- Keeping the discussion on track and fruitful

In the case of a retirement community, the discussion leader may be:

- A volunteer
- A staff member
- A guest speaker or expert from the community

The ideal discussion leader is someone who can keep the group focused on the objectives while allowing dialogue to run its course. Some of these objectives may include:

- Exploring an issue
- Understanding opposing viewpoints
- Making connections between various issues
- Gaining insight into the process of foreign affairs

PART II: CREATING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

Outlining objectives with participants and other organizational staff/volunteers can help the discussion leader make the most out of these groups. Not only will it be useful for participants to think about what they want from the discussion leader, but it also makes the discussion leader's job easier.

Coordinators

A group coordinator is responsible for the logistical and administrative elements of the discussion group.

A group coordinator is responsible for:

- Promoting the group to the community
- Registering participants
- Finding discussion leaders
- Arranging the venue, date and time of discussions
- Securing outside speakers if desired
- Making sure participants have access to the *Great Decisions* briefing books and other materials
- Assisting with audio/visual materials if needed
- Arranging for supplementary reading materials either on or offline
- Communicating with group members
- Community outreach

If the coordinator is not part of your staff, they should be able to work with the community to order materials and figure out a method of distributing these materials to the participants. They can also work with the community to figure out ways to incorporate the discussion group into pre-existing programming.



PART III: MATERIALS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

BRIEFING BOOK

The *Great Decisions* briefing book is published annually and ships in January. It consists of eight chapters on topics selected by the *Great Decisions* editorial advisory board, with input from *Great Decisions* participants. Retirement communities can order the briefing book directly at www.GreatDecisions.org.

GREAT DECISIONS IN FOREIGN POLICY ON PBS

Each episode of the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* television series aligns with the topics covered in the briefing book. Many groups find that screening the television series immediately before discussion helps refresh participants' understanding of the issue gained through reading the article, and some participants prefer to watch on their own at home.

DVDs of the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* television series can be ordered online from www.GreatDecisions.org. A digital version of the series can also be purchased through [iTunes](#).

ONLINE MATERIALS

Groups can find additional information related to *Great Decisions* topics and discussion free of charge at www.GreatDecisions.org. This includes topic overviews, news stories, book recommendations, glossaries, television series trailers and transcripts and recommended organizations. Participants can also subscribe to the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* newsletter with program updates, news, events, blogs and other materials related to *Great Decisions*. *Great Decisions* is also active on social networks like [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS AND RESOURCES

Group leaders are also encouraged to incorporate material, including op-eds and long-form articles, from the daily news cycle to start discussions and keep participants up-to-date on the topics.

We also recommend the following sites for supplementary materials for your group:

- ForeignPolicyBlogs.com
- [Real Clear World](#)
- [Foreign Policy Passport](#)
- [Global Post](#)
- [Fair Observer](#)

PART IV: PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

To attract participants, you will have to organize and initiate an effective promotional campaign. In this chapter, you can find some suggestions and sample promotional material to begin marketing your program.

PROGRAM SUPPORT MATERIALS

The Foreign Policy Association can provide the following promotional materials to your group:

- Posters
- Bookmarks
- National Opinion Ballot Reports

To obtain materials, email editorial@fpa.org.

STARTING A PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

Prior to starting any promotional campaign, make sure you have these basics figured out first. We recommend you make sure to know the following two months in advance of your first meeting:

- Who to reach
- Time and location
- Why you want to start a group and how it may serve the community

PROMOTION

Once you nail down these basics, you can start to figure out how you're going to alert potential participants and interested parties about the group. Some examples of methods you can use to effectively advertise your community's group include:

- Add an article announcing the formation of your *Great Decisions* group in your community's newsletter. Here you can explain what *Great Decisions* is to your residents, staff members, and other interested parties.
- Print flyers indicating the location, time, and cost (if applicable) of the program, and pair them with [free promotional materials](#) from the Foreign Policy Association. Place these in common areas, like recreational areas or mailrooms.
- Post an announcement on your community's website. If there's a particular events section specifically for residents, place special emphasis there.
- Start an event page on Facebook or simply announce the creation of your group by linking back to your community's event page.
- Pass out flyers and mailings to residents.

PART IV: PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

In addition to creating your own materials and using materials from FPA, you can also use the *Great Decisions* [group database](#) to find groups in your region to ask for tips or sample material, such as press releases, fliers and newsletters.

Finally, don't forget to add your information to the *Great Decisions* group directory (located [here](#)). This will not only add your group to the larger database, but it will also give you a web page to refer to. Make sure you include the name of the group leader(s), contact information, location (of the meetings and the city you're located in), and how often your group will meet (weekly, biweekly, etc.).

The FPA also compiles a list of news articles and announcements about discussion groups nationwide. If you would like to be included, feel free to email a link to us at editorial@fpa.org.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITES

No matter who is in your audience, getting the word out on your organization, school or residential community's website and social media pages is going to be beneficial for your group. Post announcements on your web page and on whatever social media networks you use; for instance, Facebook events can be a good way to rally participants. To get your message out to a wider audience, tag Foreign Policy Association in tweets ([@FPA_GD](#)).

If your website doesn't have an "Upcoming Events" section, make one. This is a great place to tell community members about your discussion group and other related events. It also gives you a URL to incorporate into promotional materials, which is essential.



PART V: RUNNING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

GROUP SIZE

Group size will vary widely based on the number of interested participants and, naturally, the size of the residential community or organization. Existing *Great Decisions* groups range from three to 700 participants. There is no set minimum or maximum number of participants for any given group — this is entirely at your discretion. If the demand is high and your discussion group has over 30 participants, you should break up the discussion group into smaller groups of five to 10 to ensure participation.

There are steps you can take to encourage participation and to get a rough head count, such as requiring all participants pre-register for a group. This will give you a better idea of how many books are needed, what venue would be best, and how many volunteers you'll need.

PROGRAM CHECKLIST

We recommend that you do the following prior to each meeting:

- Inform staff, any speakers and participants of the location and time of the meeting.
- If you have a speaker, confirm the details, including the time, location and program format, with them a few days before the meeting.
- Post signs directing participants to the meeting.
- Prepare the room for the meeting by setting up the right number of chairs, testing audio/visual equipment, and putting out materials. If you have one, make sure there is a chair or podium for the speaker.
- Make sure all participants have their program materials and set up a form for any walk ins to order additional materials.
- Prepare your introduction and acknowledgements, and always make sure to include any private funders.
- Send out a reminder email to pre-registered guests.

PROGRAM FORMAT

There's no one way to format your discussion group nor is there a set length for discussion groups. On average, meetings last an hour and thirty minutes to two hours. This gives enough time for discussion, screening and/or a presentation.

PART V: RUNNING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

LOCAL SPEAKERS AND LECTURE SERIES

Some groups kick off their meetings with a speaker, who presents for 45-60 minutes, which is followed by a 30-45 minute discussion. If your community chooses to incorporate a lecture series into a wider program, participants usually prefer to attend the lecture first and then have a discussion. If you wish to hold a lecture series by itself, make sure to decide on an appropriate way to distribute materials to attendees (i.e., the briefing book and DVD).

In either case, you'll need to find local speakers. A couple of good places to start include: universities, high schools, think tanks, the Fulbright Alumni Association in Washington, D.C. to find local former Fulbright scholars, local organizations connected to the topic, Peace Corps volunteers, and elected officials (state, local and/or national). When you contact the speakers, make sure to bring them up to speed on the format of the lecture, the date/time/place/length, the size of the audience, and an honorarium (if you can provide one). If they accept, always make sure you confirm with the speaker.

SCREENINGS

Other groups start off the program with an episode from the television series, which is then followed by discussion.

If you want more detailed examples of how successful discussion groups have organized their meetings in the past, check out the descriptions of winners of the [Frank R. Cella Memorial Awards](#), an annual award recognizing the achievements of individual discussion groups.



PART VII: ABOUT GREAT DECISIONS



HISTORY OF GREAT DECISIONS

Great Decisions is America's largest discussion program on world affairs. The name is shared by a national civic-education program, briefing book and television series administered and produced by the Foreign Policy Association. The *Great Decisions* program highlights eight of the most thought-provoking foreign policy challenges facing Americans each year. *Great Decisions* provides background information, current data and policy options for each issue and serves as the focal text for discussion groups.

FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1918, the mission of the Foreign Policy Association today, as it has been throughout its 95-year history, is to serve as a catalyst for developing awareness, understanding, and informed opinion on U.S. foreign policy and global issues. Through its balanced, nonpartisan programs and publications, the FPA encourages citizens to participate in the foreign policy process.

For more information on the history of the Foreign Policy Association, please visit our ["About"](#) page.

SAMPLE BUDGET

INCOME

Received from activities fund	900.00
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	\$900.00

EXPENSES

Program Materials from Foreign Policy Association	475.90
22 briefing books w/discount (1 for discussion group leader, 21 for participants) DVD - 2 sets (1 for institution, 1 for presenters)	
Office Supplies (index cards, pencils, DVD-RW)	30.15
Refreshments	200.30
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	\$706.35

TOTAL EXPENSES	\$706.36
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Budget & Receipts	900.00
Balance	193.65

SAMPLE SCHEDULES

SAMPLE SCHEDULE: WITH SPEAKER

TOPIC: _____

I Welcome and Introduction *(10 minutes)*

- Introduction of discussion group leader and coordinator.
- Introduce topic and speaker.

II Presentation by Guest Speaker *(30 minutes)*

III Questions and Discussion *(45 minutes)*

If your group is more than 30 people, break up into smaller groups after the question and answer session with the speaker.

- Field any questions or comments to the speaker and open the room up for discussion.
- Allow fifteen minutes or so for questions for the speaker, and then move into the discussion questions.
- Give yourself at least ten minutes if you break up into smaller groups to regroup and allow groups to present their discussions.

IV Wrap Up *(5 minutes)*

- Thank the participants and staff, but most importantly the speaker.
- Introduce next week's topic and speaker, and clarify the date, time and location.
- Make any other announcements as necessary.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE: NO SPEAKER

TOPIC: _____

V Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

- Introduction of discussion group leader and coordinator.
- Introduce topic.

VI Screening of *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* on PBS (25 minutes)

VII Questions and Discussion (45 minutes)

If your group is more than 30 people, break up into smaller groups of five or six.

- Start off with reactions to the screening (5 minutes)
- Start out with the discussion questions.
- Give yourself at least ten minutes if you break up into smaller groups to regroup and allow groups to present their discussions.

VIII Wrap Up (10 minutes)

- Thank the participants and staff.
- Introduce next week's topic and clarify the date, time and location.
- Make any other announcements as necessary.



GREAT DECISIONS IN THE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY
