



# GREAT DECISIONS IN A FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

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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 faith-based organizations across the country, Great Decisions discussion group 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.

The Great Decisions program allows your faith-based organization to bring the foreign policy debate into your community, and is easily tailored to meet your community's needs.

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

- n Reflects your faith community's global perspective by bringing foreign policy issues home.
- n Inspires participants to learn more about the world.
- n Fosters and nurtures civic participation through the [National Opinion Ballot Report](#), an annual report compiled from Great Decisions participants' views on the eight topics for that year and by raising awareness of critical national issues.
- n Provides a dynamic framework for community discussion while encouraging understanding of alternative views.
- n Enriches communities through a free exchange of ideas and through a knowledge of other cultures.

# PART I: GETTING STARTED

## 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.

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

## VENUE

Faith-based organizations generally host Great Decisions group meetings in their own facilities.

## MATERIALS

All discussion group participants should have individual copies of the [Great Decisions briefing book](#), and all groups need a copy of the [Great Decisions in Foreign Policy series on PBS](#). Coordinators can either purchase books online to sell to participants or encourage participants to purchase books on their own through [www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions). The Foreign Policy Association also provides free additional materials online at [www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions), including a monthly e-newsletter, [blogs](#) and more.

All materials are available at [www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions).



## 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 is a checklist of required and recommended practices.

#### Required:

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

#### Recommended:

- q Reach out to potential program partners;
- q Prepare a program budget;
- q Apply for funding;
- q Contact potential sponsors and apply for matching funding if you receive a grant;
- q Alert staff, congregation, and major donors about the Great Decisions group;
- q Purchase a couple extra books for attendees who may be unable to afford them;
- q Distribute promotional material to program partners;
- q Order food and refreshments;
- q Track participants through a sign up system;
- q Send email reminders to registrants both weeks and days before each session;
- q 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.fpa.org/great_decisions) your group on [www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions).

## PART II: CREATING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

### VENUE QUALITIES

Each discussion group is unique, but a good discussion 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:

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

### GROUP LEADERS

#### Discussion Leaders

The discussion leader's primary role is to act as a moderator. Discussion 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:

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

In the case of a faith community or faith-based organization, the discussion leader may be:

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



## PART II: CREATING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP

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

- n Exploring an issue
- n Understanding opposing viewpoints
- n Making connections between various issues
- n Gaining insight into the process of how foreign policy is made

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:

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

If the coordinator is not part of your staff, they should be able to work with the organization or community to order materials and figure out a method of distributing these materials to the participants. They can also work with the organization 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. Religious institutions can order the briefing book directly at [www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions).

## GREAT DECISIONS IN FOREIGN POLICY ON PBS

Each episode of the Great Decisions in Foreign Policy television series align with 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.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions). 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.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions). 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:

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

To attract participants, you will have to organize and initiate an effective promotional

## PART IV: PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

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:

- n Posters
- n Bookmarks
- n National Opinion Ballot Reports

To obtain promotional materials, email [editorial@fpa.org](mailto:editorial@fpa.org).

### PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

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:

- n Who to reach
- n Dates, time and location
- n Why you want to start a group and how it may serve the community

Your promotional campaign should consist of: internal promotion, external promotion, promotion through community groups, and the local media.

### INTERNAL PROMOTION

Make sure you announce the formation of a Great Decisions group to your institution's staff, and keep them up-to-date.

### EXTERNAL PROMOTION

Here are a few examples of how to promote your group externally:

- n 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 current community members, new attendees and other interested parties.
- n Announce the creation of the group after services or whenever you typically make announcements. Once your group is up and running, always announce the time, place, and topic of future meetings after services to alert any new community members.
- n Print flyers indicating the location, time, and cost (if applicable) of the program, and



## PART IV: PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

- pair them with [free promotional materials](#) from the Foreign Policy Association. Place these on a bulletin board outside of spaces of worship and where events are held.
- n Post an announcement on your community's event page. If there's a particular events section specifically for residents, place special emphasis there.
  - n Start an event page on Facebook or simply announce the creation of your group by linking back to your community's event page.
  - n Pass out flyers along with any programs you may hand out during services.

Finally, don't forget to add your information to the Great Decisions [group directory](#). 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 your organization is 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](mailto:editorial@fpa.org).

### COMMUNITY GROUPS AND PROMOTION

Partnering with other local groups can be beneficial in numerous ways, such as helping provide co-presenters, financial partnerships, goods and services, volunteers, and marketing and outreach. Identifying groups that you've worked with in the past or ones you'd like to work with in the future is the best way to start. Determine if your project plans resonate with these potential partners to determine if it would be mutually beneficial.

Some potential program partners could include:



## PART IV: PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

- n Arts and humanities organizations (historical societies, museums, cultural centers, book clubs)
- n Community centers
- n Other religious organizations
- n Neighboring libraries, library systems
- n Professional associations
- n Retirement communities
- n Community colleges
- n Universities
- n Social justice agencies
- n Community action coalitions
- n Fraternal organizations
- n Local business
- n Minority group associations
- n Local chapters of national organizations

For example, these groups have proven to be helpful to Great Decisions groups in the past:

- n American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- n American Association of University Women (AAUW)
- n Council for International Visitors (CIV)
- n General Federation of Women's Clubs
- n Kiwanis Clubs
- n League of Women Voters (LWV)
- n Rotary Clubs
- n United Nations Associations (UNA)
- n World Affairs Councils (WAC)

All of these organizations can assist your promotional efforts by boosting your network and providing you with more opportunities to advertise your groups. If you choose to partner with an organization or organizations, you'll have a wider audience for newsletters, emails, mailings and online marketing. Be sure to mention these partnerships in press releases, advertisements, articles and PSAs for the sake of your group and for the sake of your partners.

## LOCAL MEDIA

## PART IV: PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

Your religious community may already have a relationship with various local media outlets — use these. Determining with whom you’ve worked with in the past and on what will make getting the word out much easier. For example, you may want to:

- n Draw up an announcement for your local public broadcasting station and for radio shows.
- n Submit an announcement to your local news station with meeting details.
- n Publish an announcement in your local newspaper announcing the formation of a Great Decisions group.
- n Each week publish an announcement in your local paper reminding readers of the time, location and format of the program.

### SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITES

No matter who is in your audience, getting the word out on your organization’s website and social media pages is going to be beneficial for your group. Post announcements on your organization’s 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](https://twitter.com/FPA_GD)).

If your website doesn’t have a “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 community. 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:

- q Inform staff, any speakers and participants of the location and time of the meeting.
- q If you have a speaker, confirm the details, including the time, location and program format, with them a few days before the meeting.
- q Post signs directing participants to the meeting.
- q 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.
- q Make sure all participants have their program materials and set up a form for any walk ins to order additional materials.
- q Prepare your introduction and acknowledgements, and always make sure to include any private funders.
- q 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, such as the Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Virginia, choose to kick off their meetings with a speaker, choose to hold lecture series with local speakers on Great Decisions topics. This lecture series can be used as one part of a discussion group's activities or as a Great Decisions program by itself. If your organization 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, Peace Corps volunteers, local organizations connected to the topic, and elected officials (state, local and/or national). When you contact 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, such as the Great Decisions discussion group at the Bay Area Unitarian Universalist Church in Houston, Texas, start off the program with an episode from the television series, which is then followed by discussion. You may find sample schedules at the back of this guide, one for groups with a speaker and another for groups doing screenings.



In the end, no matter how you end up formatting your group, try to allow at least 30 minutes for discussion, if not more. 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 VI: 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 fundraising and annual budget .....	300.00
Received from an anonymous donor .....	200.00
Received from 21 individuals buying briefing booklets @ \$20.00 .....	420.00
	<hr/>
	\$920.00

## EXPENSES

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

**TOTAL EXPENSES** .....\$706.35

(\$336.35 if costs recovered from selling briefing booklets is deducted)

Budget & Receipts .....	920.00
Balance .....	213.65

# SAMPLE SCHEDULES

## SAMPLE SCHEDULE: WITH SPEAKER

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

### I Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

- n Introduction of discussion group leader and coordinator.
- n 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.

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

### IV Wrap Up (5 minutes)

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



## SAMPLE SCHEDULE: NO SPEAKER

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

### I Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

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

### II Screening of Great Decisions in Foreign Policy on PBS (25 minutes)

### III Questions and Discussion (45 minutes)

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

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

### IV Wrap Up (10 minutes)

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

## LINKS

The Foreign Policy Association  
[www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org)

Great Decisions  
[www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions)

National Opinion Ballot  
[www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions/?act=opinion\\_ballot](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions/?act=opinion_ballot)

Great Decisions Group Database  
[www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions/?act=find\\_gd\\_group](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions/?act=find_gd_group)

### BLOGS:

Foreign Policy Blogs  
[www.foreignpolicyblogs.com](http://www.foreignpolicyblogs.com)

Real Clear World  
[www.realclearworld.com](http://www.realclearworld.com)

Foreign Policy Passport  
[blog.foreignpolicy.com](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com)

Global Post  
[www.globalpost.com](http://www.globalpost.com)

Fair Observer  
[www.fairobserver.com](http://www.fairobserver.com)





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