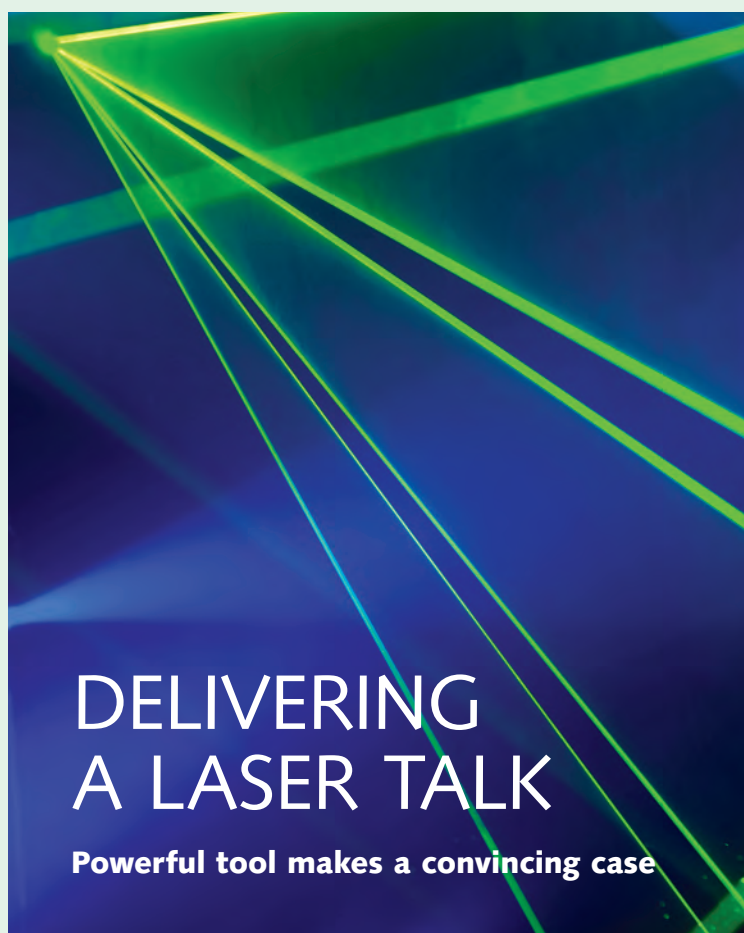


How to be an advocate



Learning how to speak powerfully about our issues is one of the most important tools in an advocate's tool kit. This tool's format was created by Results, an organization devoted to eliminating world hunger, to enable its volunteers to create powerful "laser talks," short and compelling talks that are the backbone of their work. Laser talks can be used during chance encounters with policy makers at any level, during phone calls with legislators, and in meetings with newspaper editorial boards. (See pp. 40-41.)

Strategies to promote effective policies at all levels

NSDC believes so strongly in the importance of influencing policy makers that Priority 1 of NSDC's Strategic Plan is Affecting the Policy Context. Based on the assumption that good policy promotes good practice, NSDC has strengthened the organization's capacity and resources dedicated to advancing effective policies at the federal, state, provincial, and local levels.

Recent initiatives dedicated to advancing this strategic priority include:

- Strengthening the definition of professional development to be used in the reauthorized version of NCLB;
- Examining collective bargaining agreements in collaboration with teacher associations and others (see article on p. 16);
- Engaging federal policy makers through state NSDC affiliate groups and strategic alliances (see article on p. 37); and
- Building the capacity of NSDC members and allies to advocate for NSDC's purpose.

DELIVERING A LASER TALK

EPIC acronym

Results created a simple acronym, EPIC, to help remember the basics of creating a laser talk. The letters in EPIC stand for Engage, stating the Problem, Inform about the solution, and give the Call to action.

E	ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE	<p>Get your listener’s attention with a dramatic fact or short statement. Keep this opening statement to one sentence if possible. For instance, you could say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I know you share my concern about improving the quality of teaching for all students.”</i>
P	STATE THE PROBLEM	<p>Present causes of the problem you introduced in the first section. How widespread or serious is the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Too few students experience great teaching every day, too few educators experience professional learning that has a powerful impact on teaching and student performance, and too few schools prioritize high levels of learning every day for both adults and students.”</i>
I	INFORM ABOUT SOLUTIONS	<p>Inform the listener about a solution to the problem you just presented.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“We need to ensure that every teacher has access to high-quality professional learning every day so every student achieves. That can happen if Congress passes Senate Bill 1979, which includes a change in the definition of professional learning in No Child Left Behind. This improved definition would ensure that teachers have time to work and learn with colleagues every day, that their learning is aligned with standards, and that their learning is built on a continuous cycle of improvement.”</i>
C	CALL TO ACTION	<p>Once you’ve engaged your listener, presented the problem, and told them about a solution, be specific about what you want them to do. This enables you to follow up to learn if they’ve taken this action. Present this action in the form of a yes or no question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Will you support Senate Bill 1979, which refines the definition of professional learning in No Child Left Behind? Would you become a co-sponsor for that legislation?”</i>

Delivering your laser talk

Any good musician or actor knows you would never go on stage without rehearsing first, and it’s no different with public speaking.

It’s important to speak to the other person instead of reading the information word for word. You can, however, refer to notes at first. And you’ll want to strive to keep the talks short — no more than two minutes. As you speak the information, you’ll discover where you need more practice or where you may want to change a part of it. These talks will develop and change as you learn new information over time, so be flexible and stay alert for interesting facts to update your talks.

Tips for delivering a laser talk

- Practice your laser talk several times before practicing in front of another person.
- Memorize as many of the details as possible.
- Choose a member in your group that you feel safe practicing with.

DELIVERING A LASER TALK

- Identify your audience — for example, a member of Congress or a state legislator.
- Deliver your talk without stopping, even if you have a few stumbles along the way. The more you practice, the better you will get.
- Once finished, critique yourself. Pick two things that you liked about the talk and one thing you want to improve.
- Listen with an open mind and ear for learning how to make your talk better when your partner gives you feedback on your delivery.

Tips for listening to a laser talk

- Ask the speaker to identify the target of this laser talk.
- Listen intently to the talk, trying to pick out different sections of the EPIC format.
- Did the speaker engage you up front?
- Did the speaker describe the problem and its solutions?
- Were you inspired by a clear call to action?
- Ask the speaker to critique his or her own talk.
- Tell the speaker two things that you really liked about the talk and one thing that you think he or she could improve upon.

Source: Used with permission of Results.
www.results.org

LEARN MORE

Last year, NSDC designed a tool kit to help members become effective advocates for sound federal education policy. This 24-page guide answers questions about whom to contact and how to develop and deliver a strong message.



The tool on the next two pages is just one resource from the guide. Find more when you download the tool kit at www.nsd.org/standfor/advocacytoolkit.pdf.

Other resources:

- *Advocating for High-Quality Professional Development*
www.nsd.org/standfor/advocating.cfm
- *Tools for Schools*, February/March 2008
www.nsd.org/news/issueDetails.cfm?issueID=226
- NSDC's Definition of Professional Development
www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm

HOW TO JOIN THIS EFFORT

Here are a few ways to advocate as an NSDC member, citizen, and educator.

- Develop a strong, clear, concise statement about why professional learning matters. Use the Laser Talk tool to develop this statement.
- Write a letter to your congressperson stressing the importance of high-quality professional learning.
- Schedule a meeting with your congressperson to deliver your message in person.
- Acknowledge state and federal legislative actions that make a difference for educators by sending thank-you notes or writing letters to the editor.
- Deliver your laser talk locally as often as possible. Teacher learning opportunities are frequently placed under the microscope, particularly when budgets are tight.
- Write letters to the editor or comment on news articles online about the value of learning opportunities. Uninformed comments on articles about professional development often question why teachers are given time away from students for collaborative planning. Add your voice to this conversation.
- Share success stories that demonstrate the difference your learning has made for students. Parent groups, school board meetings, and other community events are all appropriate venues for showcasing how learning pays off for kids.
- Work with your state NSDC affiliate group as a member of an advocacy team. NSDC's affiliate organizations are a critical element to the Council's policy agenda.