

Hosting a Town Hall Meeting, cont'd

Overview: Advocacy Priority Piece For facilitator only; not to be handed out to participants

Agenda

Section	Time Needed
Setting the Context	5 minutes
Identifying Issues	5 minutes
Introduction to the EPIC Model	5 minutes
Advocacy Case Development	20 minutes
Debrief	5 minutes
Letter Writing & Sharing	15 minutes
National Feedback	15 minutes
Evaluation and Closing or Transition to Priority Piece	5 minutes
	75 minutes

Handouts

- Drafting Your EPIC Laser Talk (courtesy of RESULTS)

Materials Needed

- Easel, flipchart, marking pens, masking tape
- Scrap paper for everyone and pens
- Copies of the Evaluation Form for everyone

Facilitator's Guide - Advocacy Priority Piece

A Behind-The-Scenes Manual (do not hand out to participants)

Note: Sample wording has been provided in quotations below. Text in italics indicates actions to be taken by the facilitator(s).

Setting the Context

5 minutes

"The focus for the next hour and a half or so will be the priority on **Advocacy and Grassroots Community Activities**. As I mentioned earlier, this includes advocacy to strengthen the sector proactively, not reactively. Advocating on a local, grassroots level can help the sector as a whole. More specifically, we'll discuss how to craft "laser talks" for your organization's issues to help you make the case for public policy change.

During this meeting we will:

- 1) Identify local and state issues important to the group gathered here
- 2) Practice laser talks to engage policymakers and journalists
- 3) Write letters to our local policymakers or newspapers using these speeches to put our issues on their radars.

Instead of having an expert talk at us to explain how to accomplish this, we're going to be experts for each other by using peer learning. You don't have to be a policymaker to tell whether a speech is compelling or not—you just have to be human."

Identifying Issues

5 minutes

"In table groups, brainstorm local and state issues that are important to the community's nonprofits (e.g.: state taxes on nonprofits; state budget issues that adversely affect your clients; human service, education, environmental or arts issues; local issues).

At end of brainstorming period, select one (1) of the issues to focus on during the laser talk section. If possible, try to pick an issue that has relevancy for everyone at your table."

Note: It may be even more helpful if each table chose a different issue from each of the others.

Introduction to the EPIC Laser Talk Handout

5 minutes

Handout the attachment: Drafting Your EPIC Laser Talk.

"The model we'll be using in small groups to develop laser speeches to present to policymakers is courtesy of the RESULTS organization, and goes by the name EPIC, which is an acronym that stands for Engage, Problem, Information, Call to action.

- Engage: What is a clear, compelling statement that will ENGAGE the policymaker immediately? What is the injustice or situation that needs to be changed?
- Problem: What is a solid statement of the PROBLEM that causes this situation to exist?
- Information: What additional INFORMATION does the policymaker need to know?
- Call to action: What is the CALL to action; what do you want the policymaker to do?

In table groups, we will apply these four criteria to the issue(s) we chose to focus on earlier. Our goal is a short statement, in four or five sentences, that can be used as an “elevator speech” when talking to policymakers or their staff, or as the core argument in a letter, to make the case for our issue(s).

Each table group should have someone taking notes on the discussion, especially the EPIC criteria that go into the laser speech. We’ll use these notes when we report back to the whole group.

Each criterion should have about 5 minutes of group discussion. I’ll keep an eye on the clock and let you know when to move on.”

Advocacy Case Development

20 minutes

Feel free to participate in one of the table groups or to float around during the discussions. Remind participants to answer each of the EPIC questions and then create their elevator speech.

Debrief

5 minutes

Ask each group to summarize their answers to the EPIC criteria based on the notes taken during the discussions.

“How did you come up with your EPIC model sentences? Was there anything that surprised you?”

Letter Writing and Sharing

15 minutes

“The last step to take today is to practice getting these advocacy cases down on paper to our local policymakers.

The typical format for these letters is straightforward: the policymaker’s address, a salutation line, the body of the letter, and a signoff with your full name and title, the name of your organization, and its mailing address. Today, we’re going to have you practice drafting the body of the letter using the advocacy case you developed, with any tweaks necessary to change it to your voice.

We’ll take the last 10 minutes right now to each draft one letter asking a policymaker to take action on the issues we care about, using the laser speeches.”

At the end of 10 minutes, ask for volunteers to read their letter drafts aloud to the group. Encourage others to give feedback if appropriate. Encourage participants to edit their letters and retype them on their organization’s letterhead, then mail them to their policymakers.

National Feedback

15 minutes

“All the work we’ve been doing today connects to the Nonprofit Congress, a larger movement of nonprofits. One of the most important things we can do is generate feedback and ideas for the National Council of Nonprofits, which coordinates the Nonprofit Congress, to take action on. Keeping in mind your organizations needs, let’s brainstorm a list of informational or educational resources that we need to have. Please think specifically in terms of nonprofit advocacy and grassroots community activities. We will then vote on the top three resources we need and send that information to the national office. They will gather all the feedback from all over the nation and begin working on what we ask for. Each person gets one vote.”

Record all ideas on a piece of flip chart people at the front of the room. Go through the list, one item at a time, and ask for votes (or ask each person for their vote). Note the number of votes for each item next to it on the list. After the Town Hall is complete, include the top three needed resources in your Town Hall summary to send to the National Council of Nonprofits.

Evaluation and Closing, or Transition to Another Priority Piece

5 minutes

Thank participants for attending, and for getting themselves and their organizations involved in advocating for nonprofits in their community. Distribute Town Hall Meeting evaluation forms and ask all participants to fill them out before leaving.

Drafting Your EPIC Laser Talk

Thank you to RESULTS (www.results.org) for the content of this handout and permission to use it. This content is available online at www.results.org/website/article.asp?id=1358.

The Power of Powerful Speaking

Learning how to speak powerfully about our issues is one of the most important tools in an activists' toolkit. RESULTS has created an easy format for our volunteers to create powerful "laser talks," short and compelling talks that are the backbone of our work with RESULTS. We use them when we meet with our members of Congress, when we call our editorial boards, before we host a RESULTS event or sometimes when we run across a member of Congress in the airport. We've created a simple acronym, **EPIC**, to help you remember the basics of creating your talk. The letters in EPIC stand for Engage, state the Problem, Inform about the solution, and give the Call to action.

E for Engage Your Audience

Here, you want to 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:

"According to the World Bank, over 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 a day." Or "There are over 45 million Americans who have no health insurance and 9 million of those are children."

P for State the Problem

Here you present causes of the problem you introduced in the first section. How widespread or serious is the problem?

"Each day over 26,500 thousand children under the age of five die of completely treatable diseases and malnutrition."

I for Informing about Solutions

Here you inform the listener about a solution to the problem you just presented. Develop your solution by examples of how and where it has worked, how it is proven and cost-effective and how it has benefited the poorest. You could site a recent study or report or tell a first-person account of how the solution has impacted you or others you know.

"A recent government study showed Head Start centers provide quality classrooms and teachers, and effectively prepare children for school. Head Start children demonstrated a greater increase than typical children in vocabulary and early writing."

C for the Call to Action

Now that you've engaged your listener, presented the problem and informed them of a solution, what do you want them to do? Make the action something specific so that you will be able to follow up with them and find out whether or not they have taken it. Present the action in the form of a yes or no question.

For example, *Will you cosponsor a bill to fund microcredit? Will you write an editorial about health care in America? Will you call the White House Call-in line? Will you come to a RESULTS letter-writing meeting next Thursday?* You want to state the call to action in one sentence.

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. Taking the time to educate ourselves about the issues, writing a laser talk and then practicing our speaking

skills is the most powerful tool in our Activists' Toolkit. Being an active member of RESULTS requires that we get out of our comfort zones and commit ourselves to practicing speaking the issues in front of others. The first time you use your laser talk with a member of Congress or the media, you'll never go back to winging it again.

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 always keep on the lookout for interesting facts to update your talks.

Tips for Delivering your EPIC Laser Talk:

- Practice your laser talk several times before practicing in front of another person.
- Memorize as much of the details as possible.
- Choose a member in your group that you feel safe practicing with.
- Identify your audience — for example a member of Congress or a potential new RESULTS volunteer.
- 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 would like to improve upon.
- 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 an EPIC Laser Talk:

- Ask your partner to whom they are targeting this talk.
- Listen intently to the talk trying to pick out different sections of the EPIC format.
- Did they engage you up front?
- Did they describe the problem and its solutions?
- Were you inspired by a clear call to action?
- Ask your partner to critique their talk if they forget.
- Tell your partner two things that you really liked about the talk and one thing that you think they could improve upon.