



OUR OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The National Association
for Urban Debate Leagues
Five Year Strategic Plan



OVERVIEW

Public speaking is the most important part about how we present ourselves, and it is totally lacking in the education system at all levels. NAUDL meets this critical societal need by bringing debate education to under-resourced communities so that students have opportunities to learn and practice debate, a powerful tool in teaching verbal communication skills.

Whether students debate as an extracurricular activity or during classroom time, the benefits are clear, documented, and empowering. Debate teaches students how to reason, verbally make *and defend* arguments, persuade an audience, and in other contexts present the most compelling version of themselves whether in the classroom, in a job interview, or day-to-day social interaction. In 20 years, NAUDL and its partners have served 100,000 students through **1,000,000 rounds of debate.**

The innovation, expertise and leadership amassed over this timeframe in the communities we serve is unparalleled, and NAUDL is positioned to amplify and expand the collective effort. By 2030, we seek to increase program participation from 10,000 to 100,000 students annually.

Debaters in our network can receive 65 hours of additional learning time per semester that they debate.

In some cases, it can be as high as 120 hours per semester amounting to 30 additional learning days per year.



In our network, debate involves a dynamic team-based competition where students read non-fiction texts, experiment with reason and argumentation, collaborate, listen, lead, learn critical thinking skills, see all sides to an issue, win and lose, incorporate feedback and support one- another; combining a supportive community with the rigor of competition while teaching a wide range of essential skills for success. As a result, debaters develop a mindset for success and are fully equipped to pursue the futures they choose.

Debaters in our network develop a mindset for success and are fully equipped to pursue the futures they choose because – whether they realize it or not – they are actively preparing **now**. As middle and high school students, they immerse themselves in non-fiction reading and experiment with reasoning and arguments as they prepare for rigorous, team-based competition. Because they routinely collaborate, explore all sides to an issue, win and lose, incorporate feedback, deliver public speeches, and support one another, they develop essential skills that will help them thrive in college and their careers.



THE PLAN

1. Innovative Teaching Methods
2. Student Recruitment & Community-Building
3. Network Investment & Amplification
4. Alumni Engagement Support
5. Organizational Excellence

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next five years, NAUDL can build on its leadership role to promote the power of debate to support, grow and sustain the network, and most importantly introduce debate to future generations of students and captivate their imagination for all that is possible. The purpose of this strategic plan is to direct program focus, staff time and fundraising efforts toward the activities that benefit the network and debaters at scale.

Within our network, debate so greatly impacts students on a personal level that many return to coach and support those who follow in their footsteps. For example, alumni actively serve in roles as coaches, Program Directors, Executive Directors and even Board Chairs who help advance our mission. The virtuous feedback loop of debaters who give back is extraordinary, and we are inspired by the ways they affirm the relevance of our mission and our belief in the promise of future generations of debaters.



Better Test Scores
+52 POINTS +57 POINTS
Math SAT scores, Reading & Writing SAT scores

Innovate Teaching Methods by Using Debate in the Classroom:

Engaging students, supporting teachers and breaking through class-room barriers.

Debate centered instruction is an emerging student-centered learning process utilizing debate as a tool to foster dialogue and discussion among students during the daily lesson plan across all subjects. It encourages students to become active agents in their learning, to solve problems together, and to practice public speaking in front of their peers.

The results are profound; debate can transform a classroom, a school, and an entire school district. We believe it has the power to infuse new energy into the education experience across the United States.

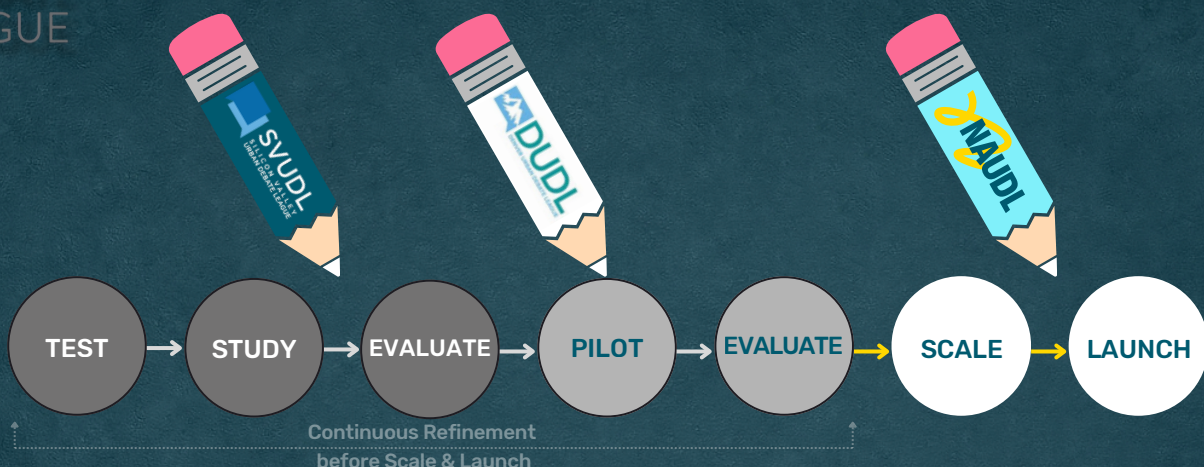
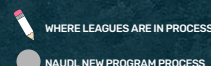
Debate centered instruction enhances student engagement and mastery of learning material across subjects and improves teacher satisfaction, retention and success in the classroom. Engaged students gain confidence and competence and teachers are inspired to do what they do best. This has the long-term **potential to reach 1,000,000 students** in the next decade.

Debate centered instruction was pioneered by our network partner, the Boston Debate League, which launched Debate-Inspired Classrooms™ more than a decade ago. This work transformed an entire school district. Boston Debate League developed an accredited Teach-the-Teachers CE curriculum with onsite training, coaching and monitoring methods that ensure consistent implementation across classrooms. Other network partners across the country have trained with the Boston Debate League to implement the program and some have adapted the methodology to fit their school districts. Thus, even more methods of training and coaching teachers in this program are emerging.

Over the next five years, NAUDL seeks to pilot this program in one to three new cities, fund and support peer reviewed research efforts on its effectiveness and evaluate the results. Studies about the experience in Boston are ongoing and show early positive insights. Several league partners such as the Silicon Valley and Denver Urban Debate Leagues are interested in participating in a pilot program for the benefit of their leagues and the network. [This video](#) captures the experience and excitement of the Boston Debate League's Debate-Inspired Classrooms.™



Re-imagine Education with Debate-Inspired Classrooms™



A group of people, including students and a man, sitting around a table and smiling, suggesting a collaborative learning environment. The background is a bright blue with a large yellow and blue abstract graphic on the left.

Education, society, and student needs have evolved over the last 20 years and by keeping the focus on how to serve students best, we serve the network best.

A signature program of NAUDL's has always been the Urban Debate National Championship (UDNC). A debate tournament like no other, the UDNC inspires, highlights, rewards, and connects debaters served by our network. Offering an opportunity for **top teams from 20 U.S. cities** to travel to a major university, convene as a community of debaters and compete for the traveling trophy, it is a capstone event of the debate season. The finalists receive scholarships, and the winners represent their entire city. In 2025, the UDNC hosted the inaugural Debate en Español round robin, showcasing teams from 5 cities where Debate en Español programming was pioneered. In 2026, NAUDL will continue to expand and grow opportunities for students to compete at the UDNC.

When NAUDL established a curriculum for teaching high school policy debate ([Teach Debate](#)), it unified the network. As the education landscape has continued to evolve, most recently due to the COVID-19 pandemic, league partners have innovated to meet the needs of their students. League partners have created new forms of debate and created curricula to teach debate to elementary and middle school students. NAUDL is best positioned to make sure all leagues have the opportunity to collaborate and benefit from innovations in curriculum and its development. These innovations are designed to support new debate coaches because when new debaters and coaches experience success, they stay.

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Sports Debate

The debate topic matters to the students we serve. Sports Debate is fun; sports topics are academically rigorous and offer the potential to introduce exponentially more students to debate in their communities. NAUDL is the first debate organization to develop a program for Sports Debate and is working with our network to launch a national program.

This new event platform has the potential to change our engagement with students and the work we do and the influence we seek to provide as a network.

Ultimately, we expect Sports Debate will drive monumental shifts in the network's capacity and impact around:

- Student participation
- Scale and scope of programming
- New evaluation methods and resources to measure impact
- Financial robustness and revenue diversity for the network.

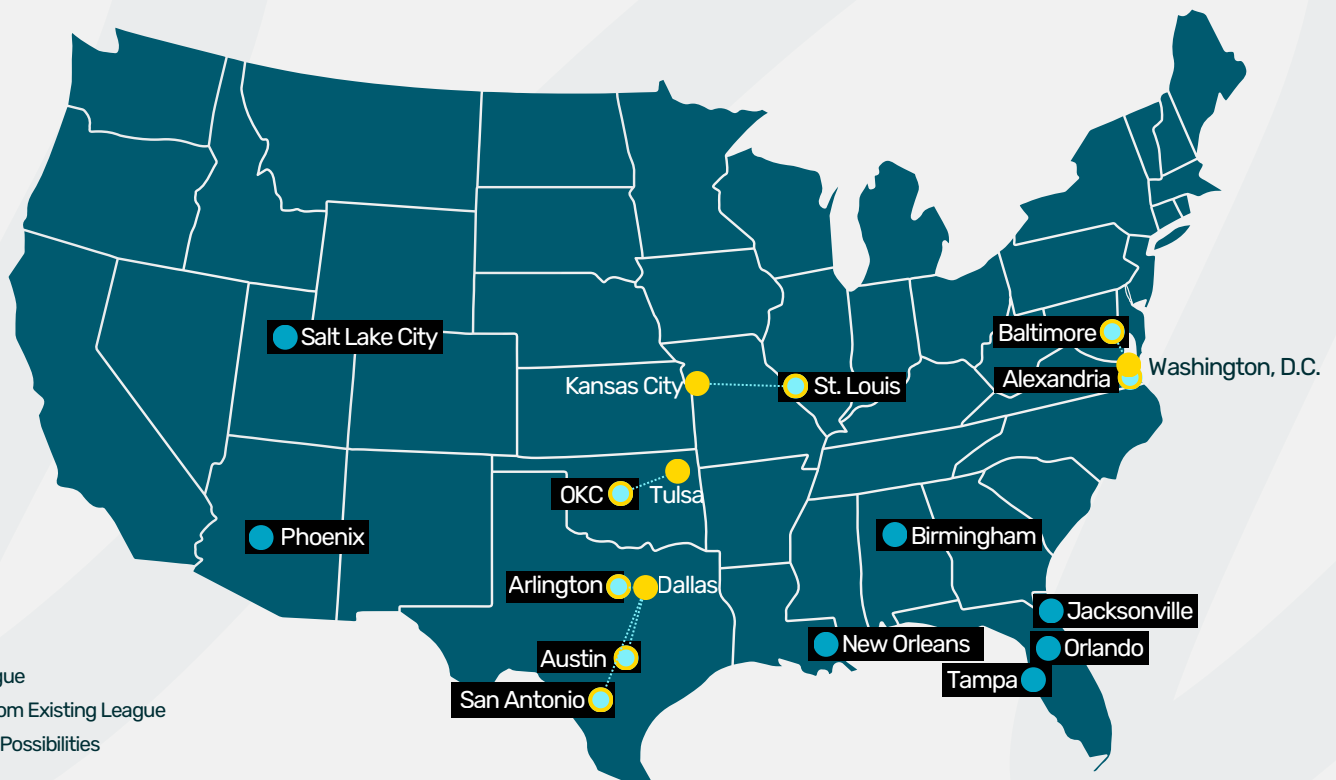


Network Expansion

There is tremendous energy across the network for expansion and there is consistent interest across the country from others committed to serving students through debate in cities that we do not yet serve. New approaches to expansion can be explored; when the right partners and resources align to promote the success of new league formation, NAUDL will support and facilitate network expansion.

We will continue to innovate and explore opportunities for league expansion that serve the needs of current leagues and future students as depicted below in the map.

EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES



NETWORK INVESTMENT AND AMPLIFICATION:

Accelerating and augmenting network wide innovation; pursuing financial resources, growth and awareness opportunities into the next decade

Marketing, Public Relations and Advocacy

NAUDL is primed to be the messenger for the network. Amplifying successes in the network and honing the messaging for our constituents, NAUDL is equipped to prioritize marketing the work and outcomes of debate for the benefit of the entire network.

The public debate series I RESOLVE serves as a resource for the network by showcasing the power of debate, creating connections with civic leaders, local businesses, and panelists in addition to generating external presence for league partners that NAUDL can amplify over time.

NAUDL leadership will advocate for the network and promote our community at education and philanthropic events to deepen ties in the education community and social impact space.

Leadership Conferences and Community Building

In its national role, NAUDL will convene the community of local leaders on an annual basis to facilitate the sharing of expertise, innovation, resources and offer peer-based training in a variety of areas.

While each league innovates to meet the needs of its community without bureaucracy, NAUDL can amplify and accelerate local success by bringing national focus. Annual conferences will be open to Executive Directors, Program Directors, Development Directors, Finance Directors and Board Chairs of league partners, emphasizing aligned goal-setting as well as collaborative problem solving and planning.

Network Resilience

While each league partner in our association varies in size, focus and capacity, all share a vision to serve as many students as possible and to collaborate across the network in order to do so. Possibilities for growth include expansion to adjacent cities, offering more styles of debate to attract more students, adding capacity by recruiting new coaches, and pairing large leagues with new leagues as mentors so that the network itself may grow. The constraint is a lack of funding to expand and the lack of large multi-year gifts that make sustainable operations and growth possible. Given the changing landscape of education funding across the United States, NAUDL can and must work to turn the tide toward network resilience. Collective impact is an integral part of this strategy, and NAUDL will work to secure funds that may be sub-granted to support local or regional efforts.

"Debate is my superpower."

Jessica Wright-Crichlow
2024 Coach of the Year



ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT:

Seeking community input to identify optimal ways to support alumni as they thrive in college and pursue their careers.



NAUDL will engage alumni for annual listening sessions to inform annual program plans and longer-term strategy. This practice will ensure representation of those we serve in setting organizational priorities and identifying perceived challenges while providing the opportunity to deepen ties between alumni and NAUDL leadership.

At the conclusion of the sixth year of NAUDL Fellows in 2025, NAUDL will leverage insights gained through a focus group of past participants and intentional dialogue with our corporate partner to determine new ways to support alumni in preparing for success beyond college.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE:

Ensuring success for the next 20 years.

Research & Program Evaluation

NAUDL is the leading organization in commissioning peer-reviewed studies and research on the impact of after-school debate. Over the next five years, we'll work with league partners to ensure that evidence takes a step forward and demonstrates the viability of alternate debate strategies and forms, including Debate-Inspired Classrooms. NAUDL will work to pioneer a matrix of evaluation methods and tools to inform the next evolution of debate programs. These practices will be created and refined in tandem with program innovations to strengthen program development and implementation. Setting this standard will help the whole Urban Debate Network showcase student readiness and engagement outcomes to prospective donors and supporters.

Board of Directors

Looking at the next 20 years, the Board must take stock of its governance and participation and reflect on next steps to enhance NAUDL as a high quality, efficient organization and thriving workplace culture.

Staff

To continue serving students, alumni, and league partners at the highest possible level, the NAUDL staff commits to a culture where leadership development, service, inclusion, collaboration, continuous improvement, and data drive positive outcomes as we work to deliver outstanding signature programs and events.

Representation in Decision-Making

As non-profit governance and board leadership milieu evolve, NAUDL can lead the charge in offering leadership training to fellow league partner Board Chairs and support local board recruitment efforts to increase representation and to ensure strong engagement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Why Our Work Matters](#)

[Urban Debate Research](#)

[Literacy Impact](#)

[Debate in Public Education](#)

[Academic Achievement Among Debaters](#)



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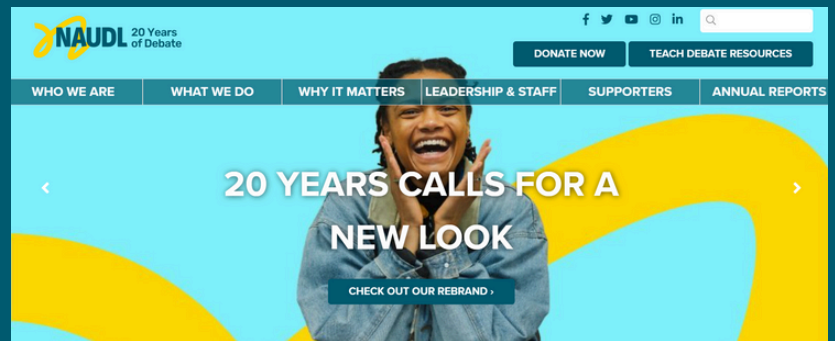
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**The next generation of voices: fueled by
reason and anchored in confidence.**