NSA®

NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION

HOW TO EARN YOUR CSP®

A GUIDE FOR THE NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION CERTIFIED SPEAKING PROFESSIONAL™

2026

NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION
NSA
CSP®
CERTIFIED SPEAKING PROFESSIONAL

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Certified Speaking Professional™ (CSP®) designation as issued by the National Speakers Association (NSA™) of the United States.

This Guide provides the CSP application timelines and deadlines and outlines the application process, including the necessary requirements to advance through each phase of the selection process.

The CSP designation affirms the detailed, thorough, and comprehensive certification process for the speaking profession, which includes external and internal reviews. It also ensures competency as a certified professional speaker, trainer, facilitator, consultant, or coach.

The CSP credential is not just a title, it's a game-changer for your career. While it is a significant designation and difficult to obtain, the rewards are worth the effort. The stringent requirements, when met, open doors to elevate your impact, influence, and income. Please read this guide completely to ensure a smooth application process and seize this opportunity to transform your career.

Who We Are and Why Earn the CSP

Who We Are
National Speakers Association (NSA) Mission: Empowering Professional Speakers to Thrive and Influence. We elevate excellence, share expertise, and challenge one another to improve.

NSA confers the CSP Designation. With this designation, meeting professionals seeking the best-in-class speakers will see your commitment to the profession and know you have top-notch speaking ability and a track record of professionalism and success.

The Value of Earning the CSP Credential
- The CSP credential offers skills validation from clients, peers, meeting professionals, and other CSP's.
- It adds opportunities to command greater fees, develop new and sustainable connections, and open the door to CSP/CPAE- exclusive educational sessions.
- It also allows you to stand out from the crowd as much as on the platform, in the training room, or the virtual studio.
- The process of contacting clients while applying for the CSP can result in an unexpected increase in speaking contracts through repeat business and referrals.
- The detailed application and review process raises applicant awareness of opportunities for improvement of their craft and business practices.
- Attainment of the CSP opens the door to further education and networking with fellow achievers.
- CSP- only events and social media platforms offer enriching experiences that are targeted toward further business growth for those at the top of the speaking field.
- The CSP has gained global recognition as an indicator of one's dedication to excellence in speaking.

The speaking profession's highest-earned international measure of professional platform competence is the CSP designation. There are fewer than 700 active CSPs worldwide.

The NSA Board of Directors confers the CSP upon those who meet the requirements, with support from the NSA's CSP Committee.

The CSP Committee ensures the integrity and brand value of the CSP designation, sets policies and application requirements, provides guidance to those individuals who evaluate candidates' video submissions by creating effective scoring benchmarks and develops renewal guidelines.

Professional Competencies. The CSP designation is earned through certified proficiency in eight competencies and four professional categories.

The primary qualifications for professional speakers are known as the Four Es, each of which includes sub-competencies:

1. **Eloquence,** including *Platform Mechanics, Performance Mastery, and Engagement:* Eloquent speakers have mastered the art of speaking. They are persuasive and impactful, connecting people to ideas with clarity and imagination.
2. **Expertise,** including *Content Development and Environmental Trends* & *Impact:* Speakers impart knowledge, skill, and experience in their chosen field in a way that highlights their expertise.
3. **Enterprise,** including *Business Development, Strategic and Operational Business Management, and Product Development:* Enterprising speakers have the business savvy to build and grow a successful speaking business.
4. **Ethics,** including *Professionalism:* Ethics are the foundation of any credible speaker. Members of the 17-member associations of the GSF demonstrate professional conduct in all they do. **A signed CSP Oath will be a part of the application process.**

   The CSP selection process is designed to measure and assess these competencies at various times throughout each process phase.

Code of Ethics & Professional Behavior. Speakers' command of professional ethics is demonstrated in various direct and subtle ways. Also can be found on our web page here: https://nsaspeaker.org/ethics-and-professional-behavior/

The following three ethical breaches will result in the denial of a CSP application.

• Intellectual Property. The most common violations include using others' stories, material, images, and videos without proper credit or permission. Professional speakers must know the legal and ethical requirements for using others' work. Being original serves speakers well. Using other speakers' materials does not serve you well.
• Representation and Business Practices. Asking a client or colleague to pay you to speak and then agreeing to return this fee is a tempting bit of fraud that has tripped up speakers seeking to pad their presentation count to qualify for the CSP. Honesty and integrity are measured in all we do, say, don't do, and don't say.
• Requests for special consideration. A request for special consideration includes submission date extensions, exceptions to video policies, and other infractions that could invalidate our process.

Application Timeline

The **Timelines** and **Key Dates** for the Class of 2026 are:

- **September 1, 2025.** Applications can be submitted beginning September 1, 2025, when the online application becomes available.
- **January 10, 2026.** Applications are due no later than Friday, January 10, 2026, by 11:59 p.m. PST. **Applications received or incomplete after this deadline will not be considered.**

Application Process (General Overview)

The CSP application process includes multiple assessments and evaluations in each of its four review Phases:

Phase 1 - Enterprise/Administrative: Includes a review of the following areas: Completion of the requisite **number of presentations during five of the last 10 years**, the necessary income levels derived from these presentations, and verification of your presentations. You must describe your speaking business model on **one page or less**; a template will be provided. You will be asked to **estimate the percentage of time** spent in various speaking categories.

Phase 2 - Client Evaluation: Involves gathering information and assessments from a **minimum of 20 external reviewers/clients** who will independently complete an online and standardized evaluation of your speaking presentations. The surveyors **MUST** be listed on your spreadsheet for the evaluation to be accepted.

Phase 3 - Video Evaluation: Is the most difficult hurdle, where a confidential evaluation of your video submission(s) is completed by a minimum of **three reviewers who currently hold the CSP designation**. They will independently complete a standardized online evaluation and assessment of your video.

Phase 4 - Final Decision: Made by a vote of the NSA Board of Directors.

Your application must pass each prior phase to reach the final phase. If you do not meet the requirements of a Phase, your application will not be advanced to the next Phase for consideration. You will be notified throughout the process to know if you have been advanced to the next Phase or if you still need to meet the requirements to be advanced to the next Phase.

This review process typically takes months to complete, given the multiple assessments and evaluations that must be gathered and reviewed. Please be patient during this time. If additional information is needed, you will be contacted.

Application Process (Detailed Overview)

Your application must pass each phase to ensure you have met the requirements and advanced to the next phase. Here is a detailed explanation of each of the Phases that are utilized in the CSP application and selection process:

Phase 1 is administrative and ensures the following: the professional education requirements have been met, a description of your speaking business model has been received, and documentation of your Enterprise on the presentation spreadsheet (see below) satisfies the presentation count and income requirements.

During this Phase, the following occurs:

- **Initial Application Approval** - You must meet the educational requirements (see above) to apply for and maintain a CSP. The NSA CSP Committee reviews the applicant list to rule out speakers facing ethics violations.
- **Application Review** - NSA will notify you when your application has been received. It is then reviewed to ensure that all prerequisites and requirements are satisfied.
- **Clarification** - NSA will email you if there are any questions regarding your application. Your responsibility is to respond to all questions completely, thoroughly, and promptly (not to exceed 5 business days).
- **Verification** - Randomly selected clients will be emailed or called to verify your presentation data.
- **Notification** - You will be notified whether your application is being put forward to the next Phase.

Phase 2 is external, and ensures that your reviewers/clients independently complete an online and standardized evaluation of your speaking presentations. There is a minimum requirement of 20 external reviewers.

During this Phase, the following occurs:

- **External Reviewer/Client Evaluation** - As indicated on your presentation spreadsheet, you are responsible for sending the required evaluation requests (the template will be provided with an embedded link) to the reviewers/clients you have selected to give evaluations. These contacts **MUST** be listed on your spreadsheet in order for their survey to be accepted.
- **Client Evaluation Progress Updates** - You will be given a deadline of 10 business days. By which your external reviewers/clients must complete their online evaluation. Within your time frame before the deadline, you will receive a status report indicating the number of reviewer/client evaluations submitted and a follow-up template you can send to your clients who have not completed the online evaluation. The first 20 online evaluations received must satisfy the minimum score requirement to move your application forward.
- **Notification** - You will be notified whether your application is being put forward to the next Phase.

Phase 3 is internal and ensures that your video submission is independently evaluated by several internal reviewers (who currently hold the CSP designation) by completing an online and standardized evaluation of your video. **They are instructed only to review your submission video; they will not browse the internet, your website, or your YouTube channel for other videos in the public domain.**

During this Phase, the following occurs:
- **Video Submission** - You will submit either one or two videos that meet the time requirements of your presentations. Submitted videos must be edited to the required length.
- **Video Evaluations** - Several internal reviewers who currently hold the CSP designation will review and evaluate your video. Trainers will review training videos; likewise, keynote videos will be reviewed by those who keynote. These reviewers will independently complete an online and standardized evaluation of your video submission using a format provided by NSA. The online evaluations must satisfy a pre-set cutoff score to move your application forward.
- **Notification** - You will be notified whether your application is advancing to the next Phase.

Phase 4 is the final review and decision by the NSA Board of Directors.

During this Phase, the following occurs:
- **Decision** - The decision to award the CSP is reached by a vote of the CSP Committee and by approval of the NSA Board.
- **Notification** - You will be notified via email of the final decision by the NSA CEO/President with a follow-up call from a member of the CSP Committee.
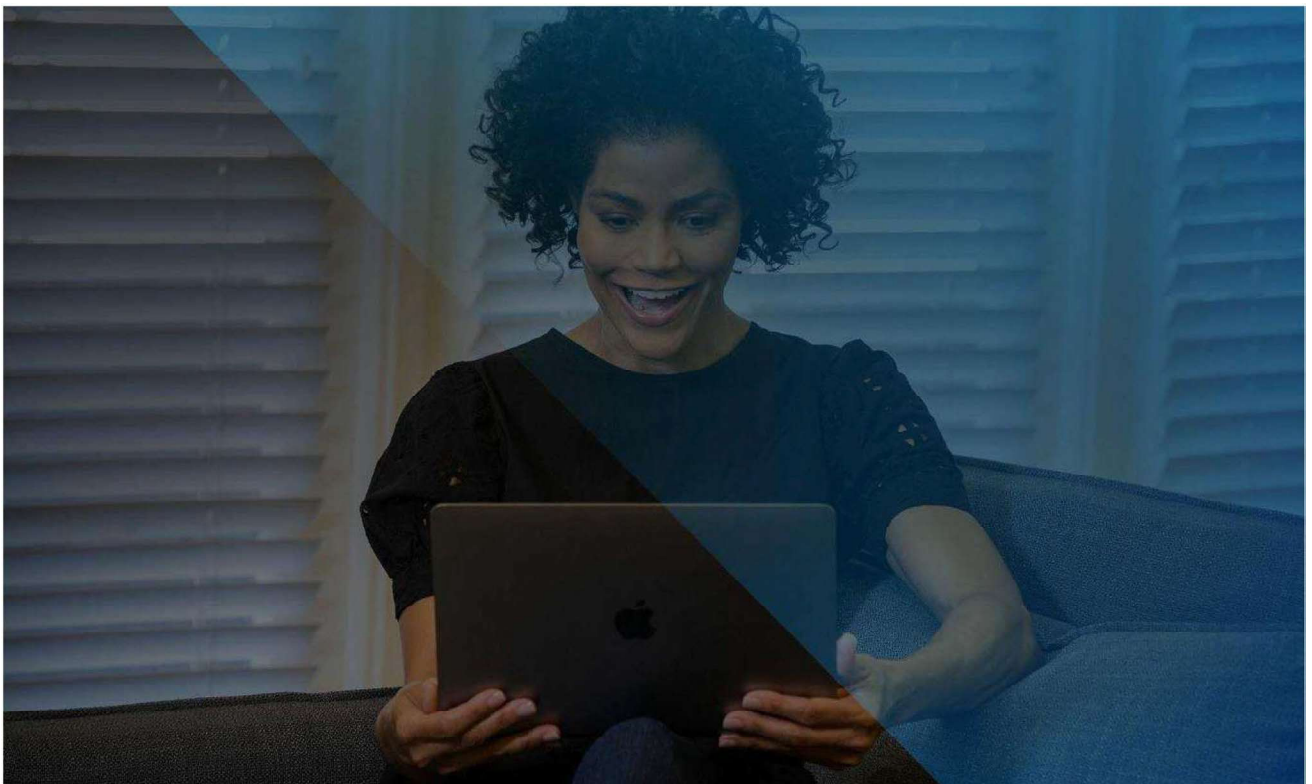
Application Requirements

The prerequisites and requirements to apply for the CSP designation as issued by NSA include:

Continuing Education Credits. An application requirement is in-person attendance at one live NSA or GSF Member Association national event. Like most professionals, speakers have continuing education requirements. These are essential to personal and professional growth and industry trend awareness.

Three Required CSP Educational Sessions. Applicants must also watch the video recordings of the three required CSP educational sessions: *How to Earn Your CSP, Business Ethics, and Professional Competencies,* presented by panels of experts. The videos are available ON DEMAND, and viewing all three is integral to the application process. You must validate your review of each video with a post-test before proceeding to the next video in the sequence. The individual post-tests must be completed for your application to proceed.

Application and Fee. The 2026 non-refundable application fee is $375 (USD). The application form and payment must be submitted online. In the event you need to re apply, the cost for resubmission is $200 (USD).

New to 2026 Application Requirements

For the class of 2026, there are four pathways to recognize different speaker models—alongside refinements to our traditional criteria. These changes make it easier for diverse speaking professionals to demonstrate excellence while maintaining the rigor that makes CSP the gold standard.

What's New?

Traditional Path (UPDATED)
- 250 paid presentations over a 10-year period
- Minimum qualifying fee: **$500 per presentation** (including honorarium, paid travel, or
- same-day product sales)
- Income benchmark: At least five years within the period with **$75,000+ in speaking income**

Mid-Volume, High-Income Path (NEW)
- **150 paid presentations** over a 10-year period
- Minimum qualifying fee: **$500 per presentation**
- Income benchmark: At least five years with **$100,000+ in speaking income**

Premium Speaker Path (NEW)
- 50 paid presentations over a 5-year period
- Income benchmark: All five years must reflect $150,000+ in speaking income

Employee/Organizational Speaker Path (NOW FORMALIZED)
- 250 internal or external presentations over a 10-year period
- Work requirement: At least 50% of salary and work time dedicated to speaking-related responsibilities
- Documentation: A letter from your company's HR department or equivalent verifying your role and work allocation

No matter which pathway you qualify for, your CSP designation will hold the exact same prestige, recognition, and respect. Each route reflects a different way speakers achieve excellence, but the achievement—and its value—are equal.

Presentation Spreadsheet/Client Form. This completed and supporting form must be emailed to NSA. Applicants may download the presentation/client spreadsheet template from the NSA website at www.nsaspeaker.org/CSP

The following data are required:
- Date
- Client organization name
- Client contact name
- Client contact email and phone
- Topic/title of presentation
- Notation of audience size
- Notation if the presentation is virtual
- Fee paid or same-day sales income
- Total income (fee paid+ same day sales)
- Contact information for a minimum of 20 clients
- Qualifying presentations that are paid will count toward your presentation numbers. Documenting a total of 250 paid presentations is critical for demonstrating professional competence. Unpaid or very low-paid presentations do not qualify.

Fees must be consistent with your usual fee. To meet the presentation count, 10 years from January 1, 2016, through December 31, 2025, may be used with NSA's previous original qualifications. All other presentations MUST abide by one of the four above pathways. Years do not have to be consecutive. Presentation spreadsheets must show the following:

• Income reflecting **ONE** of the four above pathways for **at least five of the ten eligible years (not an average) must be documented.**
• Presentations must be at least 20 minutes in length.
• At least 75% of content must be your spoken word.
• Podcasts, webinars, teleconferences, video conferences, and/or hologram sessions qualify if the number of live viewers is known and document-able.
• Recorded presentations: The pandemic created a challenge for many professional speakers, who increased their use of virtual or hybrid presentations. We have adapted our requirements to include hybrid or virtual presentations, beginning with **the 2020 calendar year.** If these sessions meet the other criteria, they will be honored, i.e., the reviewer must see an audience and experience engagement.

The CSP process clearly defines "professional speaking." No matter how entertaining, effective, or innovative, non-qualifying presentations will not count toward your presentation numbers. **The following do not count as paid professional speaking presentations:**

- Board and Manager meetings
- Coaching
- Courtroom Testimony
- Emceeing (i.e., standard lectern/platform introductions)
- More than 25% of the time is spent entertaining (i.e., singing, dancing, juggling, auctioneering)
- Radio or TV Broadcasting
- Vistage or other Membership Group Chair Facilitation (Note: does not exclude Vistage speaking engagements)
- Any other presentation that does not demonstrate or include audience engagement/interaction

On the Presentation Spreadsheet/Client Form, indicate a minimum of 20 clients willing to complete an online evaluation of your work. Clients should be familiar with your work and hold the decision-making authority to hire you for future presentations.

- Attendees of self-sponsored presentations or public seminars may be included if the attendee roster(s) from the event(s) is included when submitting one's application. The hiring authority must appear on the roster.
- Applicants are encouraged to include more than 20 clients to ensure that 20 completed evaluation forms are received by the due date.
- Applicants should have their clients' consent to list them as evaluators.

Please note that clients are more likely to complete the online evaluation if you contact them directly. Explain that you are applying for a certification of speaking excellence. Provide the link in your letter and let them know it should take about five minutes to complete.

The online survey typically asks for evaluations in the following areas:

1. Demonstrated eloquence and audience engagement when presenting and/or performing.
2. Displayed professionalism from the platform.
3. Conveyed the topic in a meaningful way to the audience.
4. Demonstrated a unique perspective on their topic.
5. Reflected expertise and knowledge on the topic area.
6. Displayed an overall performance that would be enthusiastically recommended to others.

*<u>Video Submission.</u> **The video is the most crucial element of the CSP Application. Your paperwork can be excellent, but your video can disqualify you.** Your video should represent **your most current and best work.** If you are a keynoter, submit a video of your keynote. If you are a trainer, submit a video of your training session. Videos that do not meet the set requirements, successfully demonstrate platform skills, expertise, or ethics, **or are accompanied by special requests** are the most frequent reason for an application not being put forward to the next Phase. Note that the video does not have to be professionally recorded. You are responsible for ensuring the video is well-lit, easy to hear, tracks your movements, and shows audience engagement.

One of the biggest hurdles in this application process is when an applicant's video does not show the candidate in context. Submit a video that shows you **engaging the audience with a point supporting your presentation's key concepts.** Presentations read from teleprompters, slides, handheld notes, and staged videos with a fake audience fall flat and do not represent CSP-worthy speaking skills.

For the Class of 2026, there are two video options. For *Option 1,* submit **two 20 to 25-minute** videos. For *Option 2,* submit **one 40 to 45-minute video.** Videos can be raw footage; note that they must meet the 20 to 25-minute or 40 to 45-minute limits.

Please Note

- The time limits are strict! A speaking professional must demonstrate the ability to follow client instructions.
- A reviewer will not watch a designated segment of your submission; it is **your** responsibility to share the content that (a) meets the criteria and (b) reflects most positively on you as a speaker. It is essential that the individuals reviewing your video can see and hear you speaking. The audio track must be easily understood.

The audio track must be continuous with one exception: You may cut audience portions if you make a statement on the video; note this in the description section when uploading your video to YouTube and indicate that the camera and audio will be off while the audience engages in an exercise. For example, if you give directions to the audience, such as, "You have 10 minutes of work time," then cut back when you say, "It's been 10 minutes. Let's discuss your work." making a note of audio cuts avoids the chances of your video being disqualified and dispels any questions of possible ethics violations.

Important Notice: Videos submitted as part of the CSP application must feature a genuine audience. Any submission found to include a staged audience—such as paid actors or participants who are not authentic attendees—will result in immediate disqualification.

If the audio is uninterrupted, the visual portion may be shot using multiple camera angles to show the speaker, the audience, the slide deck, or other visual aids.

Non-English speakers must provide a written transcript in English of the audio track. Videos will be reviewed by speakers of your language whenever possible.

You may ask a seasoned speaker (or two) to review your footage before submission but beware of asking friends and new CSP's. The former can be too generous, and the latter can be too harsh. Choose seasoned CSP's who can be direct and offer constructive feedback. **Current voting CSP Committee members are not eligible for pre-submission video reviews.**

Video Evaluation. Each video submission is independently evaluated by several internal reviewers who will complete an online and standardized evaluation of your video. Videos will be evaluated based on eloquence, including platform mechanics, performance mastery, and engagement. NSA selects reviewers from a pool of volunteers who currently hold the CSP and are members of NSA. All reviewers are required to sign a confidentiality statement. **Again, they will review only those videos that meet time requirements and are a part of your official application.**

Video Scoring. The video score is based on the Professional Competencies of Expertise, Eloquence, and Ethics. An applicant must receive a total average video score greater than a pre-set cutoff score.

Speaker Business Income Models. Speakers may use various business models to qualify to become CSP's. Guidelines are provided below to assist applicants with documenting income from various business models, such as individuals who organize their own events, salaried speakers, and contracted speakers. For the Class of 2026, we are asking you to describe your speaker's business income model on a single page or less.

If your salary or compensation model is unique, submit a brief written description of your business model to NSA to request a review and a ruling by the CSP Committee before you apply to ensure your work qualifies for the CSP credential.

Documented Income. The required income for your chosen pathway for at least five years *(must clearly state which pathway you are applying for)*. These five years do not have to be consecutive. This must be actual earned income, **not an average** of the documented years. A speaker may meet the income presentation count and income requirements in five years. Some speakers may need up to 10 years to document presentation count and income. Fees are to be paid by the client and kept by the speaker.

Paying yourself for a presentation does not qualify, nor does asking someone to hire you with the agreement that the money will be returned to them. These are ethical violations. Qualifying presentations must show consistent or increasing fees as a sign of professional growth. Including low fees (e.g., less than $1000) calls into question a speaker's presentation count for purposes of the CSP application.

Self-Sponsored Presentations. To show income earned from self-sponsored presentations, use the total gross income from the presentation admission price and/or same-day sales of products and services. Include print or digital promotional items such as flyers, screenshots, or brochures as supporting documentation. These materials must include the date of the event, your name as a presenter, the topic of the presentation, the cost of the attendee presentation's topic, and the attendee's cost.

Same-Day Sales of Products and Services. Regardless of an applicant's business income model, same-day sales of products and services count toward calculating income for a presentation. This includes digital products, DVDs, coaching, books, or upcoming webinars. Income earned from any service or product purchased before midnight on the day of the live presentation may be counted.

Salaried or Contracted Speakers. Speakers who are salaried or contracted employees must document fees by using the percentage of their gross annual salary dedicated to live presentation divided by the number of presentations given per each of the qualifying years. For example, as a professor, if you have a $100,000 annual salary and spend 50% of your time on-stage or on-screen during the given year, $50,000 can be applied toward your application. If you delivered 100 presentations during that year, you would show each presentation had a "fee paid" or income earned of $500 (i.e., $50,000 from speaking divided by 100 presentations=$500 per presentation). Research, travel, and other preparation time do not count toward this percentage.

Employer Verification Letter. Salaried or contracted speakers must provide an Employer Verification letter from an immediate supervisor on company letterhead verifying the following:
- Applicant's position with the company
- Years of employment for each of the qualifying years included in the Presentation Spreadsheet/Client Listing
- Gross salary for each of the qualifying years included in the Presentation Spreadsheet/Client Listing

International Applicants. The income requirement for International applicants is based on your home country's income equivalent in (US) dollars. This calculation is based on the United Nations' median salary survey for each country. Income is not to be converted to U.S. dollars. Please contact NSA to determine the income threshold for your country. Based on OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development.
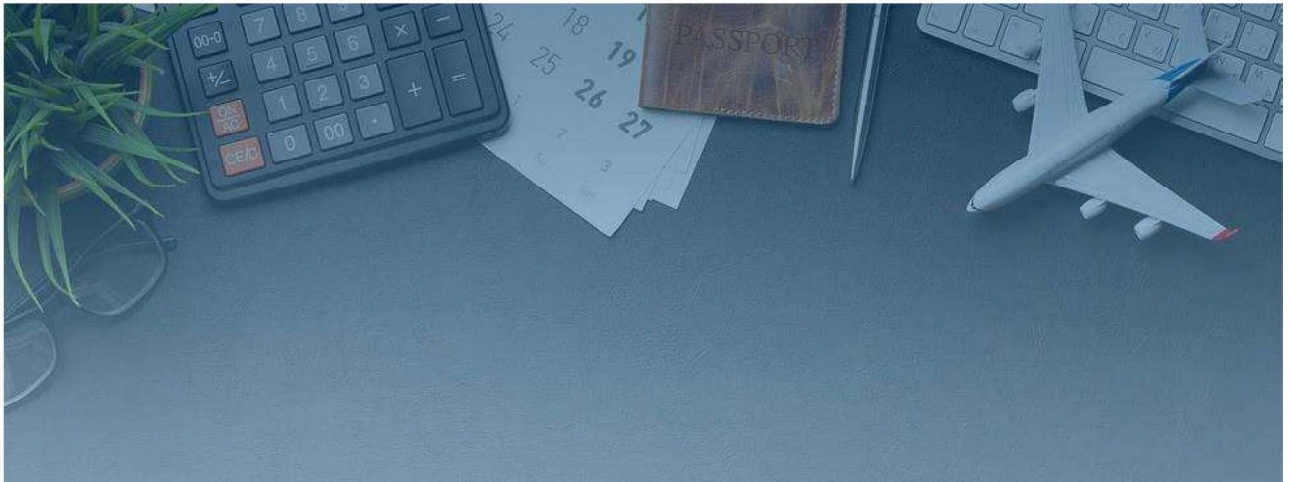
CSP Renewal. Earning the CSP designation is a demanding process. Keeping your CSP designation is much easier than re-applying. So please keep the following in mind:
- Renew every three years.
- Earn 15 NSA / GSF education credits in each three-year renewal period.
- Pay a $135 (NSA Members) or $325 (Non-Members) administrative fee.

CSP Emeritus Status is available for speakers aged 65 and older who have renewed their CSP designation at least once and completed the CSP Applicant Oath.

Spirit of NSA

"Don't worry about how we divide up the pie; there is enough for everybody. Let's just build a bigger pie!"
- Cavett Robert, CSP, CPAE, NSA Founder

Speakers everywhere do better when each of us shines. NSA Founder Cavett Robert, CSP, CPAE, believed everyone could get a piece of an ever-growing pie if we worked together.

Authorship and Acknowledgements

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