ABOUT THE COUNCIL FOR OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is the only national organization dedicated to furthering the expansion of postsecondary opportunities for low-income and first-generation students. Established in 1981, COE serves the interests of college opportunity professionals at major U.S. higher education institutions. Through nearly 3,000 federal TRIO projects, these individuals help low-income and first-generation students overcome class, social, academic, and cultural barriers to enter college and graduate. COE provides members with national advocacy on Capitol Hill, educational resources, and networking opportunities as well as research and information through the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and the Louis Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education.

ABOUT THE FEDERAL TRIO PROGRAMS

The federal TRIO programs are Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math/Science, Veterans Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. The programs serve nearly 840,000 low-income and first-generation students, veterans, and students with disabilities.

MEDIA CONTACTS AT COE

Heather Valentine
Vice President, Public Policy and Communications
heather.valentine@coenet.us

Jodi Koehn-Pike
Director, Publications
jodi.koehnpike@coenet.us

Rheanna Martinez
Assistant Director, Marketing and Outreach
rheanna.martinez@coenet.us
Dear Colleague:

This handbook has been designed to help the TRIO community work with various types of media. Members of Congress, your institution, and your community need to learn about the impact the TRIO programs have on the students they serve. Media outlets provide powerful and effective ways to communicate this information.

Every year, the TRIO programs help thousands of low-income, first-generation students, veterans, and students with disabilities across the country prepare for, enter, and graduate from college. Members of Congress need to know how TRIO has helped the students in their state or district. Working with the media can help with that as well.

This handbook is a good resource to help you promote your program and TRIO. We must increase the visibility and support for these programs. You know the impact that TRIO has had since its inception. We need to work to spread that awareness at the community, campus, and congressional level. This media relations handbook will help.

Thank you for your voice!

Arnold L. Mitchem
President
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

2

INTRODUCTION

3

ADVANTAGES OF MEDIA RELATIONS

4

WORKING WITH ALL TYPES OF MEDIA

- Basic Rules for Working with the Media
- Know your Target Audience
- Know your Message

5

WORKING WITH PRINT JOURNALISTS

- Letters to the Editor
- Opinion Editorials
- Submitting an Op-Ed
- Editorial Boards
- Feature Stories
- Tips for Print Interviews

7

WORKING WITH RADIO JOURNALISTS

- Radio Shows
- Helpful Tips for Radio Interviews

8

WORKING WITH TV JOURNALISTS

- Tips for Pitching Your Program to TV
- Helpful Tips for TV Interviews

9

GIVING A VOICE TO TRIO: HOW TO PLAN EVENTS TO ATTRACT MEDIA ATTENTION

- Broad-Based Coalitions
- Rallies
GETTING COVERAGE FOR AN EVENT

COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS
Invite a Member of Congress to Visit Your TRIO Program

VISITING YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

CONGRESSIONAL LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGNS
Personal Letters
Open Letters and Post Card Campaigns

PHONE CALLS TO CONGRESS

USING THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

BACKGROUND MATERIAL: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON TRIO

BACKGROUND MATERIAL: NINE COMMANDMENTS FOR TRIO ADVOCACY

SAMPLES
Media Advisory
News Release
Op Ed
INTRODUCTION

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) has developed this handbook to help TRIO students, TRIO college graduates, faculty, and administrators demonstrate that TRIO works!

To build public support for TRIO we must sell TRIO to the press. Members of Congress monitor the press in their districts and around the state. To establish congressional support for the TRIO programs, every member of our TRIO community must work with their local media to promote our programs. This handbook is designed to give you the tools you need to help advance equal educational opportunity in America’s colleges and universities.

Why Media Relations?
Many people see the role of public relations in their organization as only handling rudimentary communication activities, such as issuing press releases and responding to questions from the news media. However, if used effectively, working with the media can garner the following results:

- New levels of visibility for your program or organization.
- Promotion of your issues and ideas.
- More “buzz” created for your activities and efforts gets people talking about your program.
- Expanded support base.
A major objective of your media relations rests with helping to establish the credibility of TRIO in the media. Depending on the media outlet, a story mentioning TRIO may be picked up by a large number of additional media, thus spreading a single story about TRIO to many locations.

Audiences view many media outlets as independent sources that are unbiased in their coverage—meaning that the decision to include the name of the organization and the views expressed about an organization or issue is not based on payment (i.e., advertisement), but on the media outlet’s judgment of what is important. For example, a positive story about TRIO in a local newspaper may have greater impact on readers than a full-page advertisement for TRIO, since readers perceive the news media as presenting an impartial perspective on the issue.
The use of media is never a substitute for organizing or careful legal tactics, but it can often tip the balance of success. Strategic outreach to the media plays a critical role in helping advocates achieve their goals. Remember, meeting with the media can be a beneficial, and even enjoyable, experience.

Basic Rules for Working with the Media
- Be organized and well-prepared.
- Provide advance notice for events.
- Respect news deadlines.
- Always be honest and direct.
- Be likeable.
- Designate a spokesperson.

The messenger is as important as the message. Pick one official spokesperson to represent TRIO in your community—ideally, this individual should be the TRIO director. However, given the volunteer structure of regional and state TRIO chapters, it may be more beneficial to identify and prepare a cadre of spokespeople on a variety of issues about TRIO. In addition, your spokesperson should be the main contact listed on the media advisories as well as the one responsible for following up with the media and tracking the stories that are published.

Know Your Target Audience
Many communication efforts fail because they target everyone. In reality, most outreach should target a specific group of people. Make sure to define the allies needed in order to focus on the message, resources, and strategy where it counts. Since your TRIO program(s) have an impact on your entire community—including its economic stability—your target audience should include students, parents, community leaders, senior institutional staff members, and, of course, Members of Congress.

Know Your Message
Message development is one of, if not the most important element, of any good public relations activity. All of your work is guided by the ideas you want to get across and the audience(s) you want to reach. Therefore, honing the message of TRIO is vital to your campaign. Note: It is important to always check with COE’s communications team to learn more about national messages as they could tie into your local message.

A news story, whether national or local, is a good way to send your message to a lot of people at once. Why should you work with the media to advocate for TRIO? The simple answer is that winning in the court of public opinion is often an excellent way to motivate those with decision-making power to “move” an issue that the community cares about. And we know how much you care about TRIO!
Letters to the Editor
Letters to the editor provide a useful way to tell the story about TRIO. It’s another way of getting your point of view across. Every newspaper has its own policies for deciding which letters to publish, but typically it is best to keep the letter short and to the point (around 150 words). Your letter should be written in a clear and concise manner using short sentences. Look through past issues of your local paper to see the type of letters that get printed and then adopt that style.

- Type your letter neatly.
- Always sign your letter and provide your address and daytime phone number. Most newspapers will not accept a letter unless they can call and verify the author’s identity.
- Most papers will accept no more than one letter per month from the same person. Have several people—financial aid officers, college administrators, school principals, or business leaders who have worked with your program—write letters. Pinpoint successful TRIO alumni to express how TRIO positively affected their lives and their success.

Opinion Editorials
Many newspapers will accept opinion pieces submitted by members of the community. Opinion editorials—commonly referred to as “op-eds”—allow you to make arguments in support of TRIO in a newspaper, in this case, in your local major newspaper.

Most papers publish an op-ed page next to the editorial page. The op-ed page contains columns written by the paper’s own columnists and/or syndicated columnists. In some cases, newspapers will publish guest columns or opinion pieces written by authorities who don’t generally make their living as newspaper columnists.

Here is the structure of how to write an op-ed:

- Take a stand in a provocative, informative, interesting, creative, and insightful way.
- The ideal length for most newspapers is 500 to 800 words. Check the length restrictions before submitting an op-ed.
- Be creative, but to the point. Editors like the use of vignettes and analogies, but want to first know what is new and important.
Submitting an Op-Ed

- Find out the name of the op-ed editor along with their address, phone, fax, and e-mail. This information may be found online. Most op-ed editors use the titles “opinion editor” or “commentary editor.”
- Submit your op-ed to one newspaper at a time. Most newspapers insist on exclusivity for the op-ed they run, at least within their circulation area. If your piece is not accepted by one area newspaper, try another paper.
- Write a short paragraph introducing yourself and your issue to the editor.
- Cut and paste your op-ed within the body of the e-mail as well as attach it as a Word document.
- Once you send your e-mail, follow up with a phone call the next day. If the reporter is not available, leave a voicemail/phone message saying you are “following up” on the e-mail you sent.

Editorial Boards

Editorial board meetings create a unique opportunity to focus media decision makers on the benefits of the TRIO programs. It’s your chance to persuade a newspaper to write an editorial advocating your viewpoint about TRIO. Put together a group of influential people—business or community leaders, college presidents, TRIO alumni, TRIO directors, and student leaders—to meet with the editorial board of your local newspaper. If you are well-prepared and armed with the facts about TRIO, you will generate a positive editorial. Your Members of Congress monitor the editorial page closely as a barometer of their constituents’ opinions; therefore, it becomes a win-win to bring more attention to TRIO before both members of the media and your local Congressional representative.
- Call the editorial department to get the name of the editorial page editor and find out if the reporter is assigned to cover education issues.
- Submit a letter to the appropriate member(s) of the editorial staff. State the issue and underscore the timely nature of your request to meet with them.
- Be sure to stress the local angle. Include background about your most recent activities.
- Provide necessary contact names and phone numbers.
- Follow up with a telephone call to restate your request and secure interest in a meeting.

Feature Stories

People like to read about people. This is the main reason newspapers run human-interest stories and feature stories. Within your program there are outstanding students and alumni with interesting stories to tell. Members of Congress can use these personal stories to put a face on the TRIO programs as they work to increase awareness of the TRIO programs and continue to work to increase the funding level for TRIO.
- Scan your local paper for the names of your local education reporters and other reporters who are doing feature stories.
- Write an interesting, attention-grabbing lead paragraph. You want to attract the reader’s attention to get them to read the full article.
- Typical feature stories run between 2,000 and 2,500 words (six to eight double-spaced pages). Check with your local paper to verify the length of their features.
- Feature stories often use quotes, examples, illustrations, and descriptive words to engage the reader.
- Some papers run student-related features at the end of summer for back-to-school issues. Call your local paper in May or June to inquire if they are planning any special issues.

Tips for Print Interviews

- Be flexible.
- Be prepared for the reporter to tape record the interview so that he/she can pay better attention to you, rather than furiously take notes.
- Correct yourself if you realize you’ve inadvertently offered misleading or incorrect information.
- Feel free to ask whether the reporter plans to write a story using the interview, and when it’s likely to run.
Americans listen to an average of three hours of radio every day. That adds up to a huge potential audience for your TRIO program’s publicity. All you have to do is produce interesting, newsworthy, and informative material and persuade journalists to air it. If you are approaching your local radio station, it is important to consider what kinds of airtime are generally available and which formats will work best for you.

Radio Shows
During off-air time, call the host or producer of a local radio show or television community affairs program and pitch your idea of doing a show on TRIO. Some potential story ideas include:

- An outstanding graduate who has achieved great career success;
- A unique student success story (i.e., a graduate who had to overcome major obstacles to obtain his or her education);
- How TRIO specifically serves all types of student populations such as minorities, first-generation, and those from low-income backgrounds; or
- An event that highlights TRIO graduates giving back to the community financially and through service.

Suggest people from your community to serve as on-air guests such as the TRIO director, TRIO students (including alumni), and program affiliates. Work with your institution’s PR department to recruit the support of your institution’s president. This will be your president’s opportunity to show support for TRIO and discuss how TRIO benefits the local community. When the show airs, be sure to have plenty of callers lined up to flood the phone lines with support for TRIO.

Members of Congress are also frequent guests on radio talk shows, so call your member’s district office to see when their next appearance is scheduled. When the show airs, encourage your supporters to call in to discuss TRIO. This will drive home the message that constituents are interested in TRIO. It is also an excellent way to educate the community on the value of the TRIO programs.

Helpful Tips for Radio Interviews
- Modulate your voice and try to make it as expressive as possible so that you don’t speak in a monotone voice.
- Speak at a normal level of loudness. Stress key points by raising your intensity level and pitch, not your volume.
- Use words to create an image or paint a picture of your story.
- Whenever possible, personalize your delivery.
- Feel free to have notes in front of you to remind you of your message points, key facts and figures, etc.
- Don’t let a hostile caller anger or fluster you.
Television is still the leading communications force—even in the 21st century. No other medium matches the power and impact of television. Getting TV coverage of your program should rank as a top priority when it comes to measuring the success of your communications efforts.

**Tips for Pitching Your Program to TV**
- Send news releases to the assignment editor, unless you know the reporter.
- Remember, your best contacts are producers or hosts of specific shows.
- Don’t forget to reach out to national networks such as CNN or CNBC.
- Consider the television station that airs Congressional proceedings—C-SPAN.

**Helpful Tips for TV Interviews**
- Avoid unnecessary movements and gestures; they are distracting to the viewer.
- Remember to look, listen, and speak to the person with whom you’re talking—unless you have something to say to the audience.
- Resist the temptation to look at yourself on the TV monitor.
Broad-Based Coalitions
The first step is to form a coalition, a diverse group of stakeholders who draw the most benefits from TRIO. Possible members of your coalition may include your institution’s president, local high school principals, business owners, members of the local chamber of commerce, your town mayor, and religious leaders. These individuals offer a cross-section of expertise as well as provide access to political leaders to help broaden the argument for why TRIO is important. In addition, members of the TRIO community—faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, and TRIO college graduates—have a natural interest in the preservation of TRIO, as well as being able to contribute valuable information and knowledge. Building such a broad-based coalition will surely send a stronger message and give your group greater credibility with Members of Congress and the media.

Rallies
Holding a rally is an effective way to motivate large numbers of people while drawing media coverage and congressional attention to a worthwhile issue. Rallies work well in areas where local TRIO coalitions have already been formed and there are enough active people to produce a strong turnout. Though it takes a lot of work, the pay-off from a successful rally can be tremendous.

- **Organizing Committees:** Begin working with a small group to plan the logistics of your rally and advertise it to your campus, community, and the media. This group should represent a diverse set of interests, so that attendance will come from a wider spectrum of people. Each person on your committee should assume responsibility for a different aspect of the event—media, transportation, speakers, and equipment—so that the day of your rally will run smoothly.

Giving a Voice to TRIO:
HOW TO PLAN EVENTS TO ATTRACT MEDIA ATTENTION

One of the most important things you need to know is the difference between hard news, and feature and human interest stories. Hard news has time value; it must be covered now or it will be stale. Soft news is often related to hard news events, but it doesn’t have the same urgency. The truth is, you’ll almost always get coverage if you are prepared.
• **Choose a Rally Date:** Organize around key events in Congress, such as hearings that deal with education funding, diversity and equity matters, and educational opportunity. During such periods, Members of Congress will be more likely to listen to a direct message from constituents. You should also choose a date that will maximize attendance by students and other members of the community.

• **Choose an Effective Location:** Your location should be accessible to both press and students. Reserve it as soon as your date is confirmed.

• **Develop an Event Theme:** Your rally should have a name or a theme to attract the media. To achieve this goal, you should develop a set of visuals that enhance your theme (i.e. banners, creative backdrops, etc.). Even signs held by students should complement your theme. The more cohesive your message, the stronger your group will appear, and the easier it will be for the media to report your event.

• **Choose your Speakers:** Invite speakers with your local press in mind. Your goal in setting up your program should be to draw local media attention to TRIO and motivate those attending to continue their efforts. Possible speakers include Members of Congress, college presidents, TRIO students, and alumni with strong personal stories.

• **Promote your Event:** Advertise the event as widely as possible. Use the campus media, distribute flyers, literature drops, have information booths in key locations; put an announcement in your church bulletin, hang flyers in your community library—be creative and consistent in advertising your event. The more community members who know about your event, the more they will be motivated to act. Attendance in large numbers will ensure the success of your event by getting the attention of the press. Remember, however, to give everyone advance notice. Most busy people plan their schedules at least a week in advance.

• **Remember the details and keep people informed:** Check and re-check your program, location and sound equipment, final media advisories, and schedule for the day of the event. Maintain a presence. Keep your institution focused on the issue by sponsoring periodic events and providing current information. Don’t let the issue grow stale. Update literature on a regular basis to keep people aware.

• **Compile media information:** Work with your institution’s public relations office (if available). You may be able to use their media mailing and contact lists. The information in the next section will assist you in working effectively with the media. Much of this information can also be found in your local phone book or in reference books that are likely to be at your local library.
Getting COVERAGE FOR AN EVENT

Tell the media. Draft a one-page media advisory (see Samples) giving details of the event—who, what, when, where, and why—and send it to your media list. This should be done about one to two weeks in advance to allow the news directors and reporters to plan ahead. Also, send a reminder to reporters a few days prior to the event. If you are holding a rally, list the names of the speakers.

Write a press release that concisely describes the event and the message (see Samples). It should be no more than one or two double-spaced pages. Be sure your media contact’s name and phone number are on the first page of all media advisories and news releases.

Information you’ll need

Newspapers
- Names of the editor, publisher, education reporter, minority affairs reporter, editors who cover Congress, and journalists who write about Americans from low-income families
- Address, phone, fax, and e-mail for each contact
- Deadlines and days of publication (e.g., daily, weekly)

Radio Stations
- Names of the news director, talk show host(s), and producers
- Program deadlines
- Address, phone, fax, and e-mail

Television Stations (regular broadcast as well as local cable access)
- Names of the news director, education reporter
- Deadlines for each newscast and magazine show
- Address, phone, fax, e-mail

Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up. Call all of the media you invited a day or two before the event to remind them that you are holding this event. Confirm the time, location, and who will be attending. Remind them again why the event is important. If possible, fax the advisory to them again.

Be ready to greet the media. At the event, the media contact person should greet the reporters, give them a news release, and be available to answer questions or set up interviews with participants, speakers, TRIO students, and TRIO alumni.

Keep a list of reporters who attend your event
- If television reporters and cameras attended your event, watch the early and late local news.
- Be ready to record the broadcast so you have record of the coverage.
- Scan the newspapers the next day for coverage of your event.
- Send copies of all stories to COE’s communications team.
- Send the news release to reporters who did not attend your event. Remember to modify the press release to the past tense.
Communicating
WITH CONGRESS

When you invite a Member of Congress to visit, it is crucial that you begin planning well in advance. Members’ attendance often depends on your level of organization. Members of Congress are very busy. The sooner you plan your event, the better, as their schedules fill up rapidly. If their attendance is important to you, schedule your event and the agenda to fit the member’s schedule!

Contact the district office and ask to speak to the scheduler. Make the invitation, then follow up with a confirmation letter. Be prepared to be flexible on the date and plan for last-minute cancellations—the legislative calendar often changes with little notice.

Invite a Member of Congress to Visit Your TRIO Project
Members of Congress are usually anxious to meet the people whose lives are affected by their work—and when they do, the experience often remains with them for many years. Invite a Member of Congress, and the staff responsible for higher education issues, to your TRIO project (see the “Nine Commandments on Advocacy” on page 20).

Let the Members see first-hand how TRIO works and introduce them to students and TRIO alumni. Face-to-face meetings give them success stories as a reference to use when funding for TRIO is being debated or while promoting the programs with their fellow members of Congress. Schedule a meeting for the Member of Congress and their staff member with the president of the college, institutional or organizational leader, and TRIO director. These meetings will help foster a personal relationship that will provide invaluable access to the Member.

Host an issues forum. Ask your Member of Congress, local business leaders, the college president, local TRIO directors, and TRIO alumni and students to be part of a panel. Advertise the event on campus (if possible) and ask local papers to post it in the community calendar. Topics of the forum could include the impact of TRIO on the local economy (e.g., job training, educational opportunity, employment, equality, diversity in America) and participants could discuss ways to expand TRIO services to serve more students.
Maintaining a steady dialogue with Members of Congress and staff—even when there are no pending votes—will benefit TRIO students in the long run. Recognize a Member’s good work, and remember, an unexpected thank you goes a long way. If you are having a meeting in the district, remember to bring a current TRIO student and parent(s) or TRIO alumnus. (Many Members of Congress recalled meeting TRIO students during COE’s National Student Leadership Congress months after the event concluded.)

**Making an appointment.** Call your Member’s Washington or district office and ask to speak with the scheduler. Explain that you are a concerned citizen and want to meet with your representative to talk about TRIO. Whether or not your representative is available, you should make sure to schedule an appointment with the legislative assistant who covers education or budget and appropriations matters as well.

Many educators are frequently surprised that Washington legislative staff members are often young and inexperienced. No matter with whom you meet, remember, it is important to treat the staff member with respect. The staff member is the gatekeeper; the one who will make sure that the Member understands the issues you are concerned with and ensure your message gets to your representative.

**Be prepared.** Go into the meeting with specific information and examples of how TRIO works and why. Talk about your project and the students you serve. Explain how TRIO affects the people in the representative’s district (COE can provide you with data). Take copies of the “Expanding Your Educational Opportunities with TRIO” brochure to leave behind and make note of the National TRIO Achievers section.

**Be brief.** Respect the busy schedules of representatives and their staff. A typical appointment might be about 20 minutes. Do not overstay your allotted time.

**Follow up.** After your meeting, write a note to the representative and the aides with whom you met. Thank them for their time and reiterate why TRIO is so important.
The simplest way to contact your member of Congress is to write a letter. Written contact falls into two general groups: personal letters (especially from community leaders, alumni, employers, and current students) and open letters or postcards. Since congressional offices prioritize the mail they receive, and respond accordingly, some types of communication are more effective than others.

**Personal Letters**
Next to phone calls, personal letters command the greatest amount of attention in congressional offices. Letters should be brief, concise, and neat. State your message clearly at the start of the letter: “I’m contacting you because I want you to vote for continued funding for TRIO.” Then give details of your personal story: “I’m attending college today because of TRIO.” Keep it short and don’t forget to provide your return address.

**Open Letters and Postcard Campaigns**
Although they do not carry the weight of a personal letter, open letters or postcard campaigns are the next best thing. Typically, they consist of a half-page preprinted message, followed by space for the writer to personalize the letter. Open letters can be used effectively at rallies, voter registration drives, and other events. They send a consistent message, while being both personal and easy to use.

**How to Address a Letter to a Member of Congress**
The Honorable John Doe
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Doe:

or

The Honorable Jane Doe
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Doe:
Phone calls may be the easiest way to get your point across to Members of Congress. An event that includes a phone bank (several people calling from the same office or location) also provides good visuals and a “hook” for media interest.

When you call a congressional office, you will seldom speak directly with your Member of Congress. Instead, you will be leaving a message with a staff member—usually the legislative assistant responsible for briefing your representative on education issues. Keep your message brief and to the point, and don’t forget to personalize the story.

If you prefer, any Member of Congress can be reached through the Capitol Switchboard by asking for your representative’s office.

U.S. Senate Switchboard
(202) 224-3121

U.S. House of Representatives Switchboard
(202) 225-3121

For the numbers of district offices, check your local directory.

Phone banks. Focus your efforts and build enthusiasm by setting up a phone bank in a central location. This could be as simple as an information table.

- Advertise the event and alert the local media.
- Give each caller facts about TRIO.
- Ask callers (TRIO graduates, students, and alumni) to personalize their message when telling their Member of Congress how TRIO has benefited them.
All Members of Congress have e-mail addresses. If you send a message via e-mail, ALWAYS include your full name and postal address. Congressional staff use this information to verify that you are from the Member’s district or state. Some Members of Congress have “Contact forms” which ask for specific information before you reach the comment section. In addition, most Members have become active in social media communities such as Facebook and Twitter. Be sure to “like” their Facebook pages and follow them on Twitter.

**Locating your Senator or Representative on the Web.**
Access the sites below. Each site has a full listing that will take you to the correct home page.

The U.S. House of Representatives.
www.house.gov

The U.S. Senate.
www.senate.gov

**Use of social media.** Social media allows you to communicate messages to a wide audience quickly and interact with your community online. You may want to consider creating social media profiles for your programs. This will provide another means to send messages to your students, alumni, Members of Congress, and other supporters.

You should develop a messaging strategy to determine exactly what type of messages you want to communicate through each social media platform. Here are some helpful tips to get you started:

**Facebook:** Engage your audience by sharing success stories and uploading photos from events with students. Post information about upcoming activities and create events inviting others to RSVP. Ask your community to join you in advocacy and provide guidance. Ask questions that welcome online participation. You might even post relevant links, opportunities, deadlines, and other information your community might be interested in.

**Twitter:** Follow your institution, your students, supporters, and other education related accounts. Tweet live from events, meetings, announcements, or current events. Retweet (RT) information that may seem relevant to your audience and messaging strategy. Search key words to see if anyone is talking about issues of importance to your students or program and RT them. Try starting a trending topic by using a hash tag (#) directly before a word (ex. #TrioWorks) and ask that your followers do the same. Get creative in your messaging strategy to develop a constant voice for your program.

Keep in mind that you will have the most success sharing clever and succinct messages. You should be engaging and listening, not just sharing content about your program. Be careful to maintain a steady online presence without overwhelming your audience. Facebook and Twitter might be the most popular sites for social media but there are many other sites to explore as well.
Many programs serve students in grades six through 12. Thirty-five percent of TRIO students are White, 35 percent are African-Americans, 19 percent are Hispanics, 4 percent are Native Americans, 3 percent are Asian-Americans, and 4 percent are listed as “other,” including multiracial students. More than 7,000 students with disabilities and approximately 6,000 U.S. veterans are currently enrolled in the TRIO programs as well.¹

How does TRIO work? More than 1,000 colleges, universities, community colleges, and agencies now offer TRIO programs in the U.S., the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. TRIO funds are distributed to institutions through competitive grants.

Why are TRIO programs important? The United States needs to boost both its academic and economic competitiveness globally. In order to foster and maintain a healthy economy as well as compete globally, the United States needs a strong, highly educated, and competent workforce. To be on par with other nations, the country needs students, no matter their background, who are academically prepared and motivated to achieve success.

Low-income students are being left behind. Only 54 percent of low-income high school seniors go straight to college, compared to 81 percent of their peers in the highest income quartile.² Then, once enrolled in college, low-income, first-generation students earn bachelor’s degrees at a rate that is less than half of that of their high-income peers—11 percent as compared with 54 percent.³

The growing achievement gap in our country is detrimental to our success as a nation. There is a tremendous gap in educational attainment between America’s highest and lowest income students—despite similar talents and potential. Contact the Council for Opportunity in Education for current data to use in your media outreach efforts.

Background Material:

Who is served by the TRIO programs? As mandated by Congress, two-thirds of the students served must come from families with incomes at 150 percent or less of the federal poverty level and in which neither parent graduated from college. Almost 3,000 TRIO projects currently serve more than 840,000 low-income Americans.

1. Source: Data from the program files of the U.S. Department of Education, Federal TRIO Programs, annual performance reports (APRs), 2008-09


Why should TRIO be a federal initiative? Access and retention services are an absolutely essential component of the federal strategy to ensure equal educational opportunity and national economic prosperity.

- Access and retention services are vital to ensure that expenditures on student financial aid are a sound investment.
- Educational opportunity is central to the good of society.
- Budget constraints at most colleges and universities have already eliminated most of the transition programs that would specifically target or serve potential students from low-income families.
- TRIO programs bring true diversity to college campuses nationwide.

Characteristics that distinguish TRIO programs from the other programs

In many communities, TRIO programs are the only programs that help students to overcome class, social, academic, and cultural barriers to higher education. The educational and human services, which distinguish TRIO programs from all other counseling programs in America, are as follows:

One-On-One. TRIO counselors have an opportunity to work one-on-one with each student. Unlike traditional counseling programs, TRIO professionals get to know each student on a first-name basis. TRIO counselors are personally committed to the success of their students.

Performance-Based. Each TRIO project operates against specific, measureable outcome objectives as clearly defined in each approved grant proposal. TRIO project directors are held accountable and must meet their stated objectives each year if they expect to remain funded and able to help participants in their targeted service area.

Early Intervention. Two of the TRIO programs, Talent Search and Upward Bound, are early intervention programs. These programs effectively reach students in grades six through twelve who have “college potential” but often do not recognize or understand their academic and career options beyond high school. Each year, these two programs keep hundreds of thousands of promising young, low-income, and minority students in school and focused on career and college success.

First-Generation & Low-Income. Two-thirds of the students in the TRIO programs come from families with incomes under $34,000 (family of four), where neither parent graduated from college. In most cases, parents have no higher education experience, do not understand the postsecondary process, and do not necessarily value higher education.

Built on Relationships. Over a period of several months or years, TRIO professionals build both personal and professional relationships with their students. Such positive relationships are critical to the success of every TRIO program. The staff of each TRIO project creates a climate of support for students as they strive to move out of poverty and dependence. As a result of these strong positive relationships, many TRIO college graduates periodically return to their programs to encourage and inspire current students.

Tough Cases. Many students come to TRIO from neighborhoods that are filled with violence, discouragement, negativity, and hopelessness. In most cases, students in the TRIO programs are poor. A single parent raising several children, an older child helping to raise younger siblings, a physically-disabled person with few financial resources, and a struggling high school student trying to escape a life of poverty describe the young people and adults who turn to TRIO for help and special assistance.
**Consistent & Intense.** TRIO projects and professionals are consistently available to their students. In fact, some TRIO programs enable students to meet with counselors during the summer, in the evening, or on weekends. Many TRIO professionals, as part of their specified program objectives, visit students at home to discuss courses or career plans.

**Comprehensive Services.** The academic and human services as administered through the TRIO programs are comprehensive and go far beyond traditional services offered by high school or college counselors. Many TRIO students receive instruction in literature, composition, foreign languages, mathematics, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). In addition, students receive assistance in completing college admission and financial aid applications, tutorial services, and exposure to cultural events.

**People Who Have Been There.** Like their students, many TRIO professionals had to overcome class, social, academic, and cultural barriers to succeed in higher education. As a result, they can effectively relate to their students and know how to motivate young people and adults in spite of the obstacles, which often serve to discourage students from low-income families.

**Community-Based.** The community, not the federal government, determines community need. TRIO projects are funded based on clear evidence that the project is needed in a particular community or town. Criteria used in determining need in a specific area include income level, educational attainment level, dropout rates, student-to-counselor ratio, social and economic conditions, and overall demographic data.
1. Providing information (as opposed to advocating for a specific position) is not lobbying and is not prohibited. You can and should send information to your elected representatives on your TRIO project, students, and graduates on a regular basis.

2. Continue to exercise those rights of free speech which are guaranteed to you as an American citizen by our Bill of Rights.

3. However, be careful not to use any federal funds to advocate on behalf of TRIO or any other government program.

4. You may write to your Senator or Representatives on your project’s stationery—since the cost is very small.

5. If you are writing to encourage others to act on behalf of TRIO, you should not use project stationery. Many advocates have found it helpful to have organized groups (student groups, alumni, parent organizations) send letters encouraging action on behalf of TRIO. Their stationery should be printed with non-federal funds. Postage should also be paid for with non-federal funds.

6. You may encourage students and parents to write to a Member of Congress but do not make writing such a letter a mandatory assignment. Moreover, you cannot condition the receipt of services on an individual’s participation in letter writing or other advocacy activity.

7. If your salary is wholly supported by federal funds, you should be certain not to engage in advocacy while you are being paid. Do so only on days for which you have requested leave, after regular working hours, during your lunch hour, etc. Institutional time sheets should reflect this allocation.

8. If you use a phone to contact an elected representative’s Washington office, or send faxes to that office, be sure that those long-distance charges are not charged to your federal grant. Charge them to a personal phone or credit card or reimburse your institutional account for these charges.

9. You can make political contributions to friends of TRIO and other friends of education. Such contributions must come from your personal funds. Every contribution of $100 or more should be made by check.
Sample Media Advisory:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

OVER 200 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HOLD RALLY ON CAPITOL HILL TO SAVE COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

Hundreds of high school students from across the country and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area are converging on Capitol Hill in the hope of staving off the complete elimination of education programs such as TRIO*—one of the longest standing federal programs with proven historical success in helping low-income, first-generation students enter into and graduate from college. With nearly 46,000 students already having lost TRIO services, current program participants are letting their voices be heard to save the college opportunity programs that have not received a substantial increase in federal funding since FY 2002.

*TRIO is the umbrella program for Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math/Science, Veterans’ Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. The program serves nearly 840,000 low-income and first-generation students and students with disabilities.

Journalists are invited to hear select Members of Congress, national education leaders, and over 200 high school students give brief comments on the need to provide additional funding for federal TRIO programs.

What: Student Rally on Capitol Hill to Protect College Opportunity Programs

Who: Over 200 high school students, Council for Opportunity in Education representatives, and various Members of Congress

When: Tuesday, June 8, 3:30 PM

Where: The West side of the U.S. Capitol (South steps; facing the Library of Congress, across the street from the Longworth building) Washington, D.C.
If you are a journalist planning to attend or need additional information about the rally, please contact Heather Valentine at 202-347-7430 or heather.valentine@coenet.us.

Editor’s Note: Members of the media are only allowed to use handheld cameras. No video cameras with tripods are allowed.

# # #

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is the only national organization dedicated to furthering the expansion of postsecondary opportunities for low-income and first-generation students. Established in 1981, COE serves the interests of college opportunity professionals at major U.S. higher education institutions. Through nearly 3,000 Federal TRIO Programs, these individuals help low-income and first-generation students overcome class, social, academic, and cultural barriers to enter college and graduate. COE provides members with national advocacy on Capitol Hill, educational resources, and networking opportunities as well as offers research and information through the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and the Louis Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

COUNCIL FOR OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION
GEARS UP FOR ITS 2011 POLICY SEMINAR

Washington, D.C., Dec. 14, 2010—The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE)—the nation’s only organization representing the educational interests of low-income, first-generation, and minority students and students with disabilities—prepares to host its 31st Annual Policy Seminar, March 6-8, 2011, at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. With the theme “Moving Forward, Reaching Higher,” the event is expected to attract over 700 college opportunity professionals aiming to gain support from Members of Congress, Congressional staff, and Obama administration officials in an effort to advance equal educational opportunity for disadvantaged students through the federal TRIO* and GEAR UP programs.

The policy-focused gathering allows college opportunity professionals to meet one-on-one with their senators and representatives just as Members of the 112th Congress prepare to take budgetary action for education programs. Legislators will hear firsthand from TRIO practitioners as they share their personal experiences about working closely with low-income, first-generation, and minority students and students with disabilities who are preparing to enter and graduate from college. Additionally, TRIO program directors will look to express their concerns and frustrations about operating within the constraints of limited budgets due to the nominal increases provided each year to the TRIO programs.

“Our policy seminar centers on the theme of ‘Moving Forward, Reaching Higher’ to support the dedication of college opportunity professionals who have worked tirelessly for decades to advance the interests of disadvantaged students,” said COE President Dr. Arnold L. Mitchem. “We’ve invited—and expect—hundreds of college opportunity professionals to gather in Washington and together take full advantage of meeting with their legislators as well as attending informational sessions to hear the latest policy developments concerning federal TRIO programs.”
Additionally, attendees will hear presentations from several Members of Congress. They will also participate in workshops and networking opportunities as well as meet with senior administrators from the U.S. Department of Education to discuss current policies and priorities such as fiscal and programmatic regulations and reporting requirements, negotiated rulemaking, TRIO regulations developments, and much more.

As one of the longest standing federal programs with proven historical success, TRIO has not received a substantial increase in funding since FY 2002 and as a result serves approximately 40,000 fewer students today than it did just five years ago. TRIO is the umbrella program for Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math/Science, Veterans Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. The program serves nearly 840,000 low-income and first-generation students and students with disabilities.

For more information about COE’s 31th Annual Policy Seminar, contact COE Vice President of Public Policy and Communications Heather Valentine (heather.valentine@coenet.us) or COE Associate Vice President of Public Policy Kimberly Jones (kimberly.jones@coenet.us) at (202) 347-7430. Also, visit COE’s Web site at www.coenet.us.

###

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is the only national organization dedicated to furthering the expansion of postsecondary opportunities for low-income and first-generation students. Established in 1981, COE serves the interests of college opportunity professionals at major U.S. higher education institutions. Through nearly 3,000 federal TRIO programs, these individuals help low-income and first-generation students overcome class, social, academic, and cultural barriers to enter college and graduate. COE provides members with national advocacy on Capitol Hill, educational resources, and networking opportunities as well as offers research and information through the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and the Louis Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education.
Sample OP ED:

Putting Education on the Chopping Block
By Arnold L. Mitchem, Ph.D.

Over the past few weeks, President Obama has consistently shared his vision for our nation’s economic future while giving remarks about the federal government’s fiscal policy. Intense examination of the fiscal year (FY) 2011 budget agreement has been of particular interest and concern to us all, including everyday Americans who wondered about a government shutdown, the future of Medicare, and much more. Yet there’s one critical component in the agreement that has not received significant attention: College opportunity for low-income Americans.

While White House officials hammered out a deal with Congress to reach the magical $38.5 billion figure to demonstrate America’s fiscal responsibility, the President was hard pressed when drawing a line in the sand to distinguish his Administration’s position from that of Republicans in terms of simple fairness. He held up fairness as the proper measure by which to judge all policy proposals. No one should ever question fairness because it is an admirable quality. However, my question is: How does one relate fairness—in terms of financial rectitude or economic efficiency—to low-income students and their families who lives will forever be changed by the passing of the FY 2011 budget agreement?

The Administration has offered up two education efforts with proven success for the chopping block: A set of college opportunity initiatives called TRIO and GEAR UP along with adult education programs. Those of us in higher education are quite perplexed by the President’s actions. President Obama has volunteered cuts in his FY 2011 budget agreement that exceeded even those put forth by the majority of Republicans. On one hand, the President points out that his vision for long-term fiscal responsibility is based on “core values,” but then he chooses to cut away important efforts that have contributed greatly to America’s success. It’s a troubling dichotomy, to say the least.

To begin with, the Obama Administration’s decisions have harmed the efforts of TRIO and GEAR UP—with roots that stretch back to the Civil Rights Movement. In crafting college opportunity policy in the last century, Democrats acknowledged that students and families needed more than money; they needed help to overcome other persistent obstacles that hamper students’ social mobility. Poor academic preparation, lack of good information, and an adolescent culture that discouraged hard work in the present as prelude to significant payoffs in the future all needed to be addressed. TRIO and GEAR UP grew out of that recognition. Yet the Obama Administration proffered further cuts here, cuts that will result in nearly over 100,000 of the country’s most vulnerable students being kicked out of these programs.
Another set of programs up for the taking by the Obama Administration—and not by the Republicans—are adult education programs. These grants provide workforce investment, GED preparation, and adult literacy support for approximately 2.3 million low-income adults every year, ranging from high school-age students through older, nontraditional students and English language learners.

If these funds do not reach the adult learners in which they were intended to support, a brighter future may not be obtainable for these students who deserve a second chance through education.

In my view, the Obama Administration’s offering of TRIO, GEAR UP, and adult education as places to make excessive cuts tells us a great deal about their core values. Primarily, it suggests that high school students and young adults from working-class and poor families have been pushed to the margins of the Administration’s consciousness. The Administration remained steadfast in preserving efforts—however minimized—to ensure education reform and to promote early childhood learning. But efforts to support the aspirations of the less affluent for social mobility—apart from preserving the maximum grant in the Pell Grant program—were given short shrift.

Before President Obama, his Administration, and any other Democrat offers up additional cuts to programs like TRIO, GEAR UP, and adult education, they must ask themselves one crucial question: How fair is it to sacrifice the needs of low-income families striving to achieve a better life for themselves and their children? Indeed, the true test of the integrity of the Administration’s fiscal approach is not how it proclaims it from the podium, but rather, how it makes it operational in the back room.

Dr. Arnold L. Mitchem is president of the Council for Opportunity in Education, the only national organization dedicated to furthering the expansion of postsecondary opportunities for low-income and first-generation students.