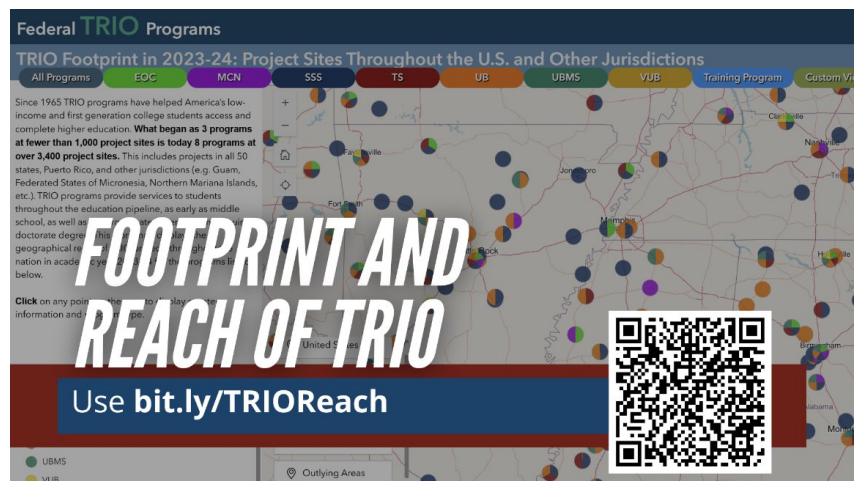


KEEP TRIO CENTERED ON COLLEGE ACCESS NATIONALLY, NOT JOB TRAINING IN A HANDFUL OF STATES

Federal TRIO Programs are the nation’s primary investment in expanding college opportunities for low-income, first-generation students. Serving students from as young as the sixth grade to adult learners, including specialized programming for military veterans, TRIO provides a comprehensive pipeline of support, from middle school through graduate education. These programs do not just open doors, they ensure students persist and succeed, with outcomes showing significantly higher college enrollment, retention, and completion rates compared to their peers. (Visit <https://bit.ly/TRIOFastFacts2026> for data about TRIO students’ success.)

TRIO serves students from every background. TRIO serves over 817,000 students through nearly 3,400 programs in each U.S. State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific Islands annually. (An interactive map showcasing the TRIO footprint may be viewed [here](#).)

TRIO programs are staples in communities of every kind – and have a particular impact in rural areas where fewer resources are available to serve students in need. Because low-income and first-generation status cross-cut racial and ethnic lines, TRIO serves students from every demographic background. Thirty-four percent (34%) of TRIO students are White; thirty-three percent (33%) of TRIO students are Black; twenty-one percent (21%) of TRIO students are Hispanic; five percent (5%) of TRIO students are Asian; four percent (4%) of TRIO students are Native American; and four percent (4%) represent other racial/ethnic backgrounds.



Don't Let TRIO Become an Employment Training Program

Recently, the Department of Education instituted programmatic changes to TRIO that steer it away from its core mission of college access and success and attempts to transform TRIO into a pipeline for employment training. More specifically, in the [FY2026 grant application for TRIO Talent Search](#), a program that serves students in grades 6-12, the agency stated that “[g]rantees should explore...mechanisms that present apprenticeships, career and technical education, and integration with the workforce system as equally viable and often faster routes to economic mobility as traditional college programs.” Similarly, in the [FY2026 grant application for TRIO Educational Opportunity Centers](#) (EOC), a program that helps adult learners re-enter the postsecondary pipeline, the agency states that it “seeks proposals that go beyond traditional college enrollment” and that grantees must provide “workshops...comparing the long-term costs and benefits of pathways (including earning potential vs. student debt....” Paired with Absolute Priorities around “expanding education choice” to emphasize apprenticeships and non-degree credentials, these changes represent a clear and intentional departure from TRIO’s mission.

As part of Title IV of the Higher Education Act, Federal TRIO Programs were created to expand access to higher education, support student success, and insure the federal investment in financial aid programs like the Pell Grant. Congress did not intend and did not design TRIO to function as employment training programs. While workforce development is an important federal priority, there are already established programs designed specifically for job training and placement. TRIO fills a different and critical role by preparing low-income,

first-generation students to enter, persist in, and complete higher education. Its focus on academic preparation, advising, and long-term support has produced decades of proven outcomes in college enrollment, retention, and degree attainment.

Just as the country has a great need for citizens skilled in various trades, manufacturing, and shipbuilding, it also has a great need for citizens with college degrees who will serve as our doctors, engineers, and teachers. Indeed, according to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce report, *[The Future of Good Jobs: Projections through 2031](#)*, just five years from now, 66% of jobs paying a decent wage will require at least a bachelor's degree.

Don't Limit Opportunity to a Handful of States

In addition to shifting TRIO towards employment training, the Department of Education also reconstructed the TRIO grant award process to prioritize opportunities for a handful of states to secure enormous sums and obliterate access in communities across the country. This is done in two ways. First, they incentivize state educational agencies, state workforce development agencies/boards, and state higher education agencies to apply by awarding them five additional points under a competitive preference priority. Second, the RFPs allow state-level applicants to apply for multi-million dollar awards of up to \$3 million in EOC and \$10 million in Talent Search.

There are currently 517 Talent Search programs in virtually every state providing services to over 322,000 students. However, under the structure outlined in the application, in which the agency expects to award just 175 grants, the pool of Talent Search projects would shrink by at least two-thirds. Similarly, there are currently 160 EOC grantees; yet, the proposal states an intention to supply just 55 awards – again, reducing the program by a third. If allowed to stand, this will have devastating consequences in communities across the nation. This is particularly true for rural communities in which TRIO programming is the only path to college access.

If this infrastructure is maintained for TRIO Talent Search and EOC, it foreshadows the potential consequences not just within TRIO, but across all federal higher education programming.

This must be stopped.

What MUST Happen Next to Preserve Educational Opportunity for Low-Income, First-Generation Students

Demand that the Department of Education rescind, revise, and reissue the Talent Search and EOC grant applications in ways that restore and affirm their mission and purpose: to ensure that students of any background, regardless of their family income or zip code, have an equal opportunity to access and succeed in college. In making these changes, the Department of Education must ensure that there is no lapse in TRIO services and should extend current grant awards as necessary to prevent such an occurrence.

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