Breakout Session Descriptions

Monday, February 16, 2026

Time: 10:00 AM - 10:50 AM

Session:	Show Me The Money! Create Financial Literacy Experiences Your Students Will Never Forget
Presenter:	MJ Pittman, CEO, Simple Money Academy
Audience:	All Attendees
Location:	Spotlight
Description:	With experience from 100+ TRIO programs, MJ offers his expertise to help you transform your view on financial literacy and empower your students for success! Come ready to have a FUN time! The first 50 attendees will receive a VISA gift card! Learn the secret strategies to host impactful financial literacy workshops for students.
Presenter Bio:	MJ is a family man, business owner, and a TRIO alum! After graduating top of his high school graduating class, MJ went on to complete a bachelor's degree in engineering at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX. While there, he secured an internship at an investment firm and became one of the youngest mutual fund brokers in the country at just 21 years old. MJ has helped thousands of people manage tens of millions of dollars, and he now takes his passion for personal finance and delivers powerful and engaging workshops through his company Simple Money Academy.

Breakout Session Descriptions

Monday, February 16, 2026

Time: 10:00 AM - 10:50 AM

Session:	Modern SharePoint Workflows for TRIO: Behind the Scenes of Student Success
Presenter:	Nate Hollister, Assistant Director, WVU Tech TRIO UB
Audience:	All Attendees
Location:	Limelight
Description:	This session introduces SharePoint as an internal operational workspace for TRIO programs, designed for staff with no prior SharePoint experience. The session begins by creating a Microsoft 365 Group in Outlook, the simplest and most reliable way to generate a SharePoint site with built-in permissions and ownership. Participants learn how to apply a premade SharePoint site template and understand the site as an internal dashboard rather than a file repository. The session demonstrates how pages, navigation, and live data replace fragmented emails, spreadsheets, and shared drives. A live demonstration will show how SharePoint lists function as structured intake forms for common TRIO workflows. Native SharePoint list rules can trigger notifications and simple approvals without Power Automate. The session concludes with operational guardrails, replication guidance, and next steps. Participants leave with a clear mental model, a repeatable setup process, and the confidence to implement one safe SharePoint workflow immediately.
Presenter Bio:	Nate Hollister serves as Assistant Director of an Upward Bound program at WVU Tech, overseeing daily operations, staff supervision, compliance, and federal reporting under the TRIO framework. His work centers on student support systems, data integrity, and operational design for programs serving first-generation and low-income students. He holds a Master of Arts in Teaching and a Master of Legal Studies with a focus on education policy and regulatory interpretation. His professional interests include process documentation, applied data workflows, and the use of low-cost digital tools to improve program accountability and continuity.

Breakout Session Descriptions

Monday, February 16, 2026

Time: 10:00 AM - 10:50 AM

Session: Prepared For What? Defining College Readiness Standards in Upward Bound

Presenters: Gerrod A. M. Williamson, Academic Specialist, UMBC TRIO UB
JuQuay Collyear, Instructor, UMBC TRIO UB

Audience: Upward Bound

Location: Feature

Description: This workshop centers on the importance of developing internal college readiness standards that intentionally align program activities, staff practices, and student supports with clearly articulated outcomes within Upward Bound programs. Participants will examine how internally defining standards can serve as a unifying structure across academic instruction, advising, enrichment, and social-emotional development while remaining aligned with federal TRIO objectives. The session will highlight how these standards promote consistency and intentionality, while allowing programs to clearly map what they do to what students are expected to gain. Attention will be given to approaches that reflect the strengths, identities, and needs of Upward Bound students.

Monday, February 16, 2026	
Time: 10:00 AM - 10:50 AM	
Session:	Elevate Your Program's Impact: Maximize Student Engagement, Achieve Proven Results!
Presenter:	Steven Heinold, Student Excellence Coordinator, Elevated Minds
Audience:	All Attendees
Location:	Act 1 & 2
Description:	This interactive session is designed to maximize student recruitment, retention, and engagement while supporting students in achieving academic success throughout their life journey. Participants will explore innovative approaches to test preparation, personal enrichment, and tutoring that empower students to succeed on standardized exams, strengthen academic growth, and build critical thinking skills. The session will highlight proven, evidence-based strategies that foster resilience, motivation, and long-term achievement. Attendees will be equipped with practical tools and fresh perspectives to enhance program outcomes and better support students at every stage of their educational pathway.
Presenter Bio:	Steve Heinold is an experienced educator specializing in STEM education, curriculum development, and equity-focused initiatives for underserved and low-income students. He currently serves as the Student Excellence Coordinator at Elevated Minds. In this role, he ensures students achieve their Personal A+™ across multiple partner programs (school districts, GEAR UP, & TRIO), leads student workshops, and aligns with day-to-day goals and broader objectives to support student success in secondary and post-secondary education. Steve was formerly the Director of Programs for the Indiana State GEAR UP Grant. Currently, he is affiliated with Purdue University's College of Education, where he has pursued graduate studies in Curriculum Studies (Curriculum & Instruction). His research interests center on STEM integration in math curricula within underserved secondary schools, with a focus on supporting low-income and underrepresented students.

Breakout Session Descriptions

Monday, February 16, 2026

Time: 10:00 AM - 10:50 AM

Session: When the Work Changes Us: Resilience and Renewal In TRIO Spaces

Presenter: Dr. Evora Baker, Director of TRIO Programs, Shepherd University
Melodia Pyne, Melodrama Education Training Services

Audience: All Attendees

Location: Act 3 & 4

Description: TRIO professionals work within constant change—shifting regulations, increasing student needs, limited resources, and the emotional labor of advocacy and care. Over time, this work shapes not only our practice, but who we become. When the Work Changes Us is an immersive, trauma-informed experience designed to support TRIO professionals in reflecting on the personal and professional impact of their work. Through guided reflection, storytelling, and a facilitated glass mosaic experience, participants are invited to explore themes of change, resilience, and renewal in TRIO spaces. The mosaic serves as a symbolic anchor for examining how professional challenges can alter identity, energy, and purpose—while also revealing opportunities for growth and reimagining. Rather than focusing on techniques alone, this session creates space for meaning-making, connection, and intentional leadership. Participants will leave with renewed clarity, practical strategies for sustaining well-being, and a deeper understanding of how to continue serving students while remaining grounded in themselves in an evolving TRIO landscape.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Evora Baker and Melodia Pyne, M.Ed., are experienced educators and higher education leaders with extensive backgrounds in TRIO programs and student success initiatives. Melodia Pyne is the founder of Melodrama Education and Training Services LLC and specializes in trauma-informed, experiential learning focused on resilience and transformational leadership.

Dr. Evora Baker holds a Doctor of Education in Leadership and brings deep experience in TRIO program administration, student retention and persistence, staff development, and data-informed decision-making to advance access and equity for underrepresented students.

Together, they facilitate immersive experiences that support TRIO professionals in navigating change while remaining grounded in purpose and striving toward resilience.

Breakout Session Descriptions

Monday, February 16, 2026

Time: 10:00 AM - 10:50 AM

Session:	Engaging Students in COE's Student Opportunities Programming: Strategies for Meaningful Participation
Presenter:	Angela Holley, Director of Student Opportunities, COE
Audience:	All Attendees
Location:	Encore
Description:	The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) offers a wide array of Student Opportunities Programming designed to elevate academic achievement, leadership development, and career readiness for TRIO students nationwide. This session will provide an in-depth look at these programs and highlight effective strategies to increase student awareness, interest, and sustained participation. Participants will gain practical tips, outreach ideas, and engagement approaches that have proven successful across TRIO campuses and communities. Whether you are new to COE programming or looking to strengthen your student recruitment efforts, this session will equip you with actionable tools to help more students access transformative opportunities.
Presenter Bio:	Angela Holley currently holds the position of Director of Student Opportunities at the Council for Opportunity in Education. In this capacity, she bears the responsibility of formulating and delivering a comprehensive array of services and initiatives aimed at bolstering access to higher education for low-income and first-generation students. Before assuming her present role, she amassed 22 years of experience serving as a Director for both Student Support Services and Educational Talent Search. Angela has consistently demonstrated unwavering dedication to furthering the mission of TRIO throughout her professional tenure. She has notably held the positions of President for WV TRIO and President of the Mid-Eastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (MEAEOPP). In addition, Angela has been actively involved in various committees, including Alumni, Student Leadership, and Governmental Relations. She has been honored for her exemplary service, receiving accolades such as the MEAEOPP Outstanding Service Award, the WV TRIO Achiever Award, and the Pathway to Prominence Award. Mrs. Holley's commitment to TRIO stems from her active participation in the Student Support Services Program at Marshall University. Hailing from a low-income, first-generation background in rural Appalachia, she achieved the milestone of being the first in her family to pursue and obtain a bachelor's degree in psychology, a Master of Arts Degree in Higher Education Counseling, and a second Master's Degree in the Humanities. As a TRIO Alumni, Mrs. Holley regards it as a privilege to offer services aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for TRIO-eligible students nationwide.