TRiO students are a community composed of common characteristics. Whether they are a first generation student, a student with low socioeconomic status, or a student with a disability, they find their commonality in the challenges they face in completing a college degree. Conversely, each TRiO student also comes with their individual and meaningful experiences that make their journey to graduation a unique one.

In this unit, students come together to share their experiences to begin the process of engaging as advocates and active civic leaders within the TRiO program. Through group activities, reflection and exploration, TRiO students will begin to understand their individual roles as leaders within the TRiO community and develop a group identity that will emphasize their strengths as they take civic action.
Depending on the size and familiarity of your group, the program will begin with introductory or get-to-know-you activities. Forming activities help to, (1) allow members of the group to learn about each other, and (2) provide opportunities for building relationships. While many of these type of activities can be effective, here are two suggested activities for TRiO programs.

**Name Games**

Name games come in a variety of styles. For student groups who do not know each other, it is important to start by giving them a chance to introduce themselves to the group. The “adjective name game” is an example of one in which students choose an adjective that starts with the same letter as their first name. Going around the circle, students say their name, the adjective and attempt to recall the names and adjectives of those who went before them. Name games are very common activities and can be found in many websites and books.

**Do You Know Me?**

This activity is for groups who have already done some work getting to know each other or are made up of students who have worked together before.

The facilitator begins with a stack of index cards that have the name of one student from the group on each. After shuffling, hand out the cards. Students have about 10 minutes to mingle around the classroom asking fellow classmates what they know about the student listed on their card. In a circle, students introduce the person on their card with the information they collected in their conversations and emphasizing that student’s positive qualities.

“We can never get a re-creation of community and heal our society without giving our citizens a sense of community.” -Patch Adams
My TRiO Story: A Leader Among Us

In preparation, have one of the program facilitators write a personal statement about how they became involved in the TRiO program. Write a story from your perspective, but use descriptive language to show how you felt about the process of becoming a TRiO student/staff/alumni. Try to allow the story to be interpreted by your audience. For example: “In high school I was a student who tended to earn low grades like Cs and Ds and as a result I did not enjoy attending school. I avoided making friends until one day when a TRiO counselor came to my English class to talk about what we were going to do after high school. She looked me right in the eyes and said, ‘Do you know you have the potential to get a college degree?’ and I told her I did not think that would be possible given my grades. She explained that I had the potential that I needed to believe in myself. It was a moment that I saw a different future for myself. It was TRiO that helped me believe I could succeed.”

Tips & Ideas

- Group size makes a great deal of difference when facilitating activities. For these activities it is recommended to have a group of approximately 8-12 students.

- Age and experience also matters. Would you describe the individuals as mature and committed to the group?

- How did your group form? This can speak a great deal to the motivation students have to participate. Consider the following:
  - Are they required to be there or did they choose to join?
  - Do they understand what the program is generally about?
  - Do they know why they are there?

Developing Group Identity

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- Talk to students about the goals of this activity, which include identifying, writing and recording our personal TRiO stories. Explain that we will be piecing together their stories in a personal narrative, which is an alternative way to tell the story of their journey as students.

- Write the characteristics of a personal narrative on a white board:
  - Clear purpose (why this event is important to you)
  - First person account (help us understand the narrator)
  - Opening sentence (question, interesting observation, or summary of purpose)
  - Organized facts and events
  - Explanation of need and how it was addressed
  - Sensory description
  - Conclusion (what was learned or accomplished/effect of self)
Unit 1: Constructing a Community of Civic Leaders

- Explain that in the first part of this process we are going to talk about who we are as leaders and experiences we have had as leaders. Play the following TED Talk for the students: http://www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership.html
- Have a discussion about “lollipop moments.” Ask students to share experiences or stories of times when someone influenced them or when they think they acted as a leader and changed someone else’s life. Have the participants choose an experience that they will write about. Tell them to focus on why it was important in shaping who they are, what they learned and why it was memorable.
- On a sheet of paper have students identify the event, the observations they had, and the facts and details of their experience.
- Have the participants free-write about their experience, telling it in story form. Explain that they should avoid simply stating what happened and actually describe the events.
- After students are done free writing, have them share their stories in a group setting or in pairs if they are more comfortable.
- Finish by explaining that this is just a warm up to what they will do next in creating their personal TRiO story. Collect or have participants keep their write-ups in a file.

Reflection

Having students reflect throughout the program is key to the impact it has on them as an individual and as a group. Use the following activities to encourage ongoing reflection.

1 Team Journal
Use a collective journal to record the experiences of the students in the group. Start out by explaining that they will pass a journal between each other throughout the program and take turns writing and responding to what others have written. Let the students pass the journal along at the meetings or in-between if they are in contact between meetings.

2 Community Map
Using a children’s puzzle, hand out pieces to the participants and have them write something they felt or learned during the meeting. Reassemble the puzzle and have each of them share what they wrote.
The Air In There

Everyone knows what it means to be in an elevator. You step in, no one looks at you, and you press the button for your floor. Doors close, and you instinctively glance up at the numbers blinking above the doors as if it holds the answer to the meaning of life. Moments pass, and you glance up again and can’t believe that you still have 10 floors to go. You can’t wait to get out… you know how it goes.

Share a little of this with your group, to get them ready for the what’s next. It will often spark a laugh, perhaps even a few comments about how dumb it seems. Which, if this happens, is just perfect, and it is recommended you allow it to occur.

• Starting with a large circle, invite every person to simply walk to the other side of the circle from where they are standing as if they had just entered an elevator. No talking, barely any eye contact, and certainly no interaction. Take note of what happens, how it feels, etc. This is ‘Elevator Air.’ Ask your group to comment on how it felt for them.

• Next, ask everyone to return to their original spots in the circle, but this time as if they were entering a room full of people they knew and had not seen in a long time. If you feel they need some prompting, ask the group to describe what this scene would look like. This is ‘Long Lost Air.’ Again, observe what happens. Without even saying it, they will instinctively go out of their way to interact with one another.

Now, put it to the group, which atmosphere felt the most comfortable? Which atmosphere do you believe would be the most productive? Take just a few moments to establish what caused the difference, and to connect this to your program. Typically comments such as “it was safer”, “I felt trusted”, “I knew everyone better”, “I was able to take risks” will be offered. Suggest that this is exactly what you hope to achieve with your program, and importantly, you invite every member of your group to take responsibility for creating this atmosphere right here, right now.
Urban Dictionary: Civic Leadership

It’s time to define “Civic Leadership.” Split your group into pairs or smaller groups and assign them a different part of speech along with a variation on “civic leadership.” These could include:

• Noun (Civic Leader)
• Verb (Civic Leadership)
• Adjective (Civically Engaged)
• Adverb (Civically)

Ask the groups to explore the sense of the word and how they might explain it to a small child or someone who is learning the language. Have the groups write a description of the word, trying to be as descriptive as possible and using synonyms in the definition.

Have the groups write a final, concise definition of the word they were given on a ½ poster board to display. Ask participants to present their definitions to the larger group.

Leaders Leading Leaders

• Create the playing area. For a group size of 12 people start by creating a 10 ft x 10 ft square on the ground out of rope or tape (adjust the area for larger or smaller groups).
• Create obstacles in the playing area by filling the square with pieces of tape. The more obstacles the harder the game will be. Spread out the obstacles in such a way that there are no straight pathways through the minefield. During the actual activity, you may find the group has located an easy pathway. You can change the playing area by rearranging the tape pieces.
• Hand out a notecard to each player and have him or her write down an attribute they bring to the team. Distribute these in the playing area.
• Have everyone find a partner and stand on the “start” side of the square playing area. With one partner blindfolded, the other partner must help them move through the playing area without hitting any of the obstacles. If they do, they will have to start over. As they are passing through they must locate one notecard to carry back with them. Once they are on the other side, the second player must be guided across.
• Debrief the activity by discussion how they are each leaders within their group and how they will face obstacles and need to work together to overcome them.

References:


