

# Maine Educational Opportunity Association

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## 43rd Annual Conference



Black Bear Inn,  
Orono, ME  
January 7-9, 2026

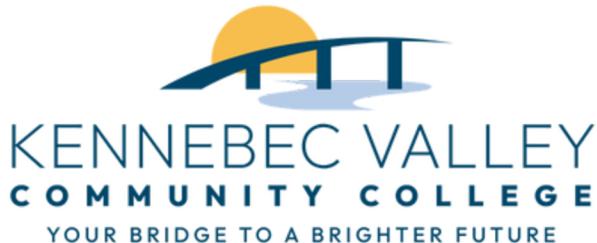
# Thank you for Your Support!

The MEEOA Executive Committee and Conference Committee would like to thank the following organizations for their partnership in developing our conference. Please see their advertisements in this program.

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# MEEOA Executive Committee 2025-2026



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**Vacant:** Maine Leadership Institute (MELI)

**Casey Henderson:** Technology Chair

Want to help us fill some of these vacancies? Consider joining the MEEOA Board today!

# Welcome to MEEOA Con 2026!

We're so glad that you're here with us! Our theme this year is "Rising from the Ashes," which was chosen very intentionally. As you all know first-hand, this past year has been tremendously difficult for us TRIO and GEAR UP staff. Between unexpected grant cancellations, late GANs, and all of the general uncertainty, it has been incredibly stressful for us all. Yet, despite all of this uncertainty, us staff have still been showing up and fighting relentlessly for our students and our programs. We have all shown great resilience and continue to rise up for our students, and we believe that deserves to be celebrated!

We want to thank some folks who helped us make this conference possible! First, we'd like to thank our MEEOA President, Ashlee Fecteau, for her help with the conference planning process and for making all of the conference nametags. Next, we'd like to thank Past President Michelle Richards for handling the conference registration payments, and also thank her and Liz Hansen-Roosa for agreeing to take on the silent auction. We also would like to thank Casey Henderson, who updated the MEEOA website for us and handled electronic registrations. We'd also like to thank Noelle Dubay, who secured thousands of dollars in conference sponsorships. A big thank you as well to Teri Mann for planning out the Alumni Awards ceremony. Lastly, we'd like to thank our conference keynote speaker, Senator Jill Duson! We couldn't have done this without you all!

We'd also like to thank our conference sponsors UMA and CMCC, as well our coffee break sponsors, Worthington Scholars and KVCC. Lastly, we'd like the thank the Black Bear Inn for allowing us to host our event here!

We hope that you all have a wonderful experience attending sessions, networking, and being around other folks who understand first-hand the important work that you do.

Here's to a wonderful conference!

Your Conference Chairs,  
Abby Waceken & Sue Caron





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# MEEOA Con 2026 Schedule

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Location:</b>
	<b><u>Wednesday, January 7</u></b>	Black Bear Inn
2:30pm-5:30pm	<u>Pre-Conference:</u> The Power of Positive Experiences - Maine Youth Thriving	Kineo Ballroom
	<b><u>Thursday, January 8</u></b>	
8:15am-9:15am	Check in & Registration	Black Bear Inn
9:15am-9:30am	Opening remarks and welcome	Kineo Ballroom
9:30am-10:30am	Keynote: Senator Jill Duson	Kineo Ballroom
10:30am-10:45am	Coffee Break - Sponsored by KVCC	Kineo Ballroom
10:45am-11:45am	<b>Breakout Session 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roots in the Ashes: Cultivating Resilient Leadership - Elyse Pratt-Ronco, PhD (Director, Arnold Mitchem Leadership Institute)</li> <li>2. Google Suite Tech &amp; Productivity Tips to Save Time - Jill Plummer (GEAR UP)</li> <li>3. Building Welcoming Youth Programs - Soren</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kineo Ballroom</li> <li>2. Cadillac</li> <li>3. Sargent</li> </ul>
11:45-12:45pm	Lunch	Kineo Ballroom
1:00pm-2:00pm	<b>Breakout Session 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Embracing our Humanity: A workshop for authentic, human-centered work - Michelle Richards (UMPI Upward Bound)</li> <li>2. Updates from the World of Financial Aid -Mila Tappan (FAME)</li> <li>3. Community Circle: Changing Landscapes - Beana Hopkins (Bowdoin Upward Bound)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kineo Ballroom</li> <li>2. Cadillac</li> <li>3. Sargent</li> </ul>

# MEEOA Con 2026 Schedule

2:00-2:15pm	Coffee Break - Sponsored by Worthington Scholars	Kineo Ballroom
2:30pm-3:30pm	<b>Breakout Session 3</b>  1. Burning Compliance Questions Workshop - Jen Rudolph (COE)  2. Image-Making and Sharing your Story - Randy Schroeder (UNH TRIO, Retired)	1. Kineo Ballroom  2. Cadillac
3:30pm-6:00pm	Wellness Break	
6:00pm-8:30pm	Banquet & Alumni Awards	Kineo Ballroom
8:30pm	Raffle Drawings, Silent Auction Ends	Kineo Ballroom
9:00pm-11:00pm	Hospitality!	Room 301
	<b><u>Friday, January 9</u></b>	
8:30am	Breakfast Starts	Kineo Ballroom
9:00am-9:45am	Plenary - COE Update (Jen Rudolph)	Kineo Ballroom
9:45am-10:15am	Plenary - NEOA Update (Arielle Derival)	Kineo Ballroom
10:15-10:30am	Coffee Break	Kineo Ballroom
10:30am-11:30am	MEEOA State Meeting	Kineo Ballroom
11:30pm	Conference Ends	

# Pre-Conference: January 7

## The Power of Positive Experiences



**Educate. Engage. Empower.**

"The Power of Positive Experiences" is an interactive, research-informed learning session designed for those who support Maine youth in their schools and communities every day. This three-hour interactive workshop translates the science of resilience and Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) into practical strategies that help educators and mentors create environments where young people can thrive. It also covers the importance of creating opportunities for staff to cultivate their own positive experiences together in ways that reduce the likelihood of compassion fatigue and turnover.

Grounded in the Science of the Positive, this session provides both insight and hands-on learning designed to revive your connection to yourself and to others and increase your capacity to support young people. Participants will deepen their understanding of how experiences shape lifelong health and well-being—and discover how intentional moments of connection can transform outcomes for themselves and the students they serve.

**About Maine Youth Thriving:** Maine Youth Thriving (MyT; pronounced “mighty”), formally Maine Resilience Building Network is dedicated to fostering resilient communities, schools, and families that prioritize the positive. We do this by building awareness, education, and partnership. Our team of experts provide trauma-informed, equity-centered professional development, comprehensive programs, resources, and individualized consultations to youth-serving professionals, healthcare providers, educators, caregivers and community members. Through these grassroots efforts, we aim to make a positive and lasting impact on the lives of Maine’s future generations. If you want to learn more about Maine Youth Thriving, check out our website! <https://maineyouththriving.org/>

# Keynote Speaker: Senator Jill Duson



A steadfast leader in the City of Portland and throughout the state of Maine, Senate Assistant Majority Leader Jill C. Duson served as a member and Chair of the School Committee prior to serving over 19 years as an At-Large City Councilor, including two terms as appointed Mayor.

As an elected municipal official, Sen. Duson fought for resources to support schools, while at the same time holding school leaders accountable to create a quality system where all students can learn and thrive. Sen. Duson focused on ensuring safe, affordable and accessible housing options in Portland that match the diverse needs of those who live and work in the city.

Additionally, the Senator has been a strong advocate on environmental policy. She has a substantial record of active leadership regarding Blue Economy sustainability, sea level rise mitigation, advocacy for public trails and open space conservation and working waterfront preservation in Greater Portland and across the state.

# Keynote Speaker: Senator Jill Duson



The Senator is a retired attorney and a Maine state employee. Her most recent state service included Director of Compliance for the Maine Human Rights Commission and Director of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. Standing up for accountability, reform and transparency on behalf of Mainers has been a constant throughout her professional career.

A child of the Civil Rights movement, Sen. Duson was inspired by the activism of her mother, who empowered local parents to protest and demonstrate for over two years to achieve court-ordered desegregation of schools in her hometown. Recognizing that those who came before her fought to open doors, Sen. Duson has dedicated a lifetime to serving our community and holding doors open for today's students, families, emerging activists and leaders. She is committed to paying the fight forward.

Sen. Duson holds a Bachelor of Arts from Antioch University and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania School of Law. She is serving her second term in the Maine Senate, where she serves on the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee and the Government Oversight Committee.

Sen. Duson is first Black woman to serve in the Maine Senate. She represents Senate District 27, which includes part of Portland and part of Westbrook.

# Workshop Descriptions

## Session 1:

### **Roots in the Ashes: Cultivating Resilient Leadership**

Elyse Pratt-Ronco, PhD - Director  
Arnold Mitchem Leadership Institute

In this historical context, leaders are experiencing compassion fatigue. Also referred to as vicarious trauma, this outcome of working with people who have experienced their own trauma and mental health challenges, can lead to burnout. The concept of Trauma Stewardship gives practitioners a framework for better understanding their own trauma exposure responses. Together, we will explore the concept of Trauma Stewardship and then shift our attention to strategies you can employ to help your teams move through some of the common trauma responses that prevent us from sustainable good work.

### **Building Welcoming Youth Programs**

Soren

This interactive training is designed for organizations that provide direct youth programming, and will provide a foundational understanding of best practices related to working with youth in Maine.



# Workshop Descriptions

## Session 1:

### Google Suite Tech & Productivity Tips to Save Time

Jill Plummer - School Specialist  
GEAR UP Maine RISE

Do you find yourself wasting time searching for documents in your drive, locating website links, rewriting similar emails, dealing with an overloaded inbox, and forgetting about important events? How would you like to ditch the frustration and learn some tricks to avoid these headaches? Join me in this session to learn some simple strategies to make your workflow more efficient. Come prepared to share some tips you know to make this a collaborative session! Walk away with a list of resources to share with coworkers.

[bit.ly/MEEOA26Google](https://bit.ly/MEEOA26Google)

# Workshop Descriptions

## Session 2:

### **Embracing our Humanity: A workshop for authentic, human-centered work**

Michelle Richards - Upward Bound Coordinator  
UMPI Upward Bound

In an increasingly fast-paced, technology-driven world, professionals often drift into patterns of efficiency over empathy, output over connection, and performance over purpose. This workshop offers a structured, reflective, and engaging experience designed to reconnect participants with their humanity and empower them to center their humanity in their lives and work.

### **Updates from the World of Financial Aid**

Mila Tappan - College Access and Outreach Manager  
Finance Authority of Maine (FAME)

There is no doubt the last year has been incredibly challenging for TRIO and GEAR UP staff. In the financial aid world, we continue to brace for more changes and uncertainty. In this session we'll review changes that have occurred and discuss what's on the horizon. We'll talk about the recent, positive changes to the FAFSA process resulting in the FAFSA being easier to complete than ever. We'll close with Q&A so bring your questions and any scenarios that you'd like to discuss.

# Workshop Descriptions

## Session 2:

### **Community Circle: Changing Landscapes**

Beana Hopkins

Assistant Director (Washington County) - Bowdoin Upward Bound

This circle will start and end with grounding exercises, the bulk of the content will be generated by the attendees sharing their stories and connecting with one another as a group. The focus of the circle will be on building trust and to hear one another's challenges of adjusting to the current landscape in higher education. Folks are welcome to share their stories, protocols, practices as individuals and as programs. Brainstorming and strategy are welcome, though please remember to bring listening ears to the circle as well as we want to hear from everyone attending the session. Ultimately we will be focused on how we are each coping with supporting our students in the now.



# Workshop Descriptions

## Session 3:

### **Burning Compliance Questions Workshop**

Jen Rudolph

Associate Vice President, Pre-College & State Initiatives  
Council for Opportunity in Education (COE)

Office Hours: Bring your program compliance & operational questions to an open Q & A session with COE Staff, Jen Rudolph.

### **Image-Making and Sharing Your Story**

Randy Schroeder

UNH TRIO Programs (Retired)  
NEOA Alumni Chair

“I’ve used this Image Making Self-Assessment session for many years for TRIO students creating application statements for college or graduate school and for scholarship applications. This has also been a great tool for developing career ideas and direction, especially for those who feel a little lost.”

In this workshop we will do some creative brainstorming, put your images on paper, transform this into a next step, and then do a little bit of writing at this point. This can be a thoughtfully reflective experience for TRIO & GEAR-UP professionals. The goal is that you will be able to use this exercise as a future tool for your own students, too. Drawing and creative materials will all be provided. REMINDER: you are all artists!

# MEEOA Alumni Rising Star Award Recipient

**Anna McKee**



**SMCC TRIO Student  
Support Services +  
UMF Johnson Scholars  
(SSS) Alumni**

Both personally and professionally, Anna has come to embody the ways in which TRIO empowers students to believe in themselves on their own terms. In 2019, she applied to be a SMCC TRIO Peer Leader; she excelled in this role working one-to-one with fellow TRIO students. With her confidence growing, she decided to transfer to UMF to study special education. As someone with learning differences herself, Anna had often felt like an outsider. Her experiences at both SMCC and UMF allowed her to flip the script, looking from the inside out by learning about myriad ways people experience and navigate the world. With her UMF degree in hand, she has strived to translate her book learning into practice to help people who face barriers to success, first as a Vocational Support Advisor at Goodwill and more recently, as a TRIO Coach at SMCC, working specifically with students with disabilities. She has shared with me that stepping into a position to provide the same services that she herself received has been empowering and humbling, especially at a time when TRIO's very existence is at risk. TRIO has meant the world to her, both during her undergrad and as she begins her professional career.

# MEEOA Alumni Rising Star Award Recipient

**Izabella  
Comstock**



**Bowdoin Upward  
Bound Alumni**

Bella credits Upward Bound as of the most transformative influences of her academic journey, helping her build confidence, strengthen her skills, and to truly see herself as capable of achieving more than she ever thought was possible. While in UB, Bella was nominated for the TORCH Scholarship at Northeastern University, and ended up receiving said scholarship, which gave her a full-ride to her dream college. After finishing her first year at Northeastern, Bella returned to Maine and worked as a TA for the Upward Bound program because she wanted to give back to the program that had given her so much. Since graduating from Northeastern University with a degree in Criminal Justice/Criminology and minors in Psychology and Law & Public Policy, Bella has built a career dedicated to victim advocacy and public service, as well as receiving her National Advocate Credentials. Her co-op with the Kennebec County District Attorney's Office introduced her to the field of victim services, and after graduation she returned as a legal secretary and victim advocate for the Juvenile Crimes Unit, where she worked closely with restorative justice programs. In 2022, she continued this work at the Sagadahoc County District Attorney's Office, focusing primarily on domestic violence cases. Bella now serves as a Victim Advocate in the Criminal Division of the Maine Attorney General's Office, working with families who have lost loved ones to homicide. Her role includes early support during investigations, ongoing communication through complex court processes, and standing with families as cases move toward trial.

# MEEOA Alumni Rising Star Award Recipient

**Mya Hebert**



**UMaine Educational  
Talent Search +  
CMCC Student Support  
Services Alumni**

**In high school, Mya was a part of the Educational Talent Search program through her high school (Lake Region). She credits ETS with helping her immensely through the college application and financial aid process, which was done mostly virtually due to COVID. During her senior year she applied and ended up enrolling in the Human Services major at CMCC. While at CMCC, Mya participated in the TRIO SSS program, which allowed her to be more prepared for what to expect in college. In July of 2023, while she was volunteering with Loaves and Fishes at a barbecue and resource fair for the unhoused, she was granted a Pay It Forward Certificate from the Alumni of Distinction for 2023, and was also a member of the board of directors of the Alumni Association of UMA. At the end of her major at CMCC, the TRIO program assisted her with navigating how to apply for a practicum and which organizations would best suit me. Through this, she ended up applying for her practicum at Safe Voices, an organization that supports survivors of Domestic Violence and Sex Trafficking. At the end of her practicum with Safe Voices and after graduating from CMCC, she was encouraged by the Shelter Advocates at Safe Voices to apply for a job with them. She applied and was hired immediately after her practicum. She now works as an Advocate at the Safe Voices shelters. In this role she works with survivors of Domestic Violence and Sex Trafficking at the shelters, and also supports survivors in finding housing.**



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# MEEOA Member Programs

**BOWDOIN COLLEGE**  
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**CENTRAL MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**  
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SYNTIRO  
GEAR UP  
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# MEEOA Past Presidents



1984-1985 - Jerry Ellis (UM SSS)

1985-1986 - Ludger Duplessis (Bowdoin UB)

1986-1987 - Claire Nelson (UMF SSS)

1987-1988 - Dave Megquier (UM EOC and ETS)

1988-1989 - Scott Bradley (Bowdoin UB)

1989-1990 - Lynn Ploof-Davis (UMF UB)

1990-1991 -

1991-1992 -

1992-1993 - Jane Kimball Foley (UM ETS)

1993-1994 -

1994-1995 -

1995-1996 -

1996-1997 - Jane Kimball-Foley (UM ETS)

1996-1997 - Carol Brush

1997-1998 - Judy Look (UMaine ETS)

1998-1999 - Maureen Ferriter (UM SSS)

1999-2000 - Dave Megquier (UM EOC and ETS)

2000-2001 - Johannah Burdin (USM UB)

2001-2002 - Michelle Melanson (Bowdoin UB)

2002-2003 - Sara Henry (UM SSS)

2003-2004 - Teresa Smith (KVCC SSS)

2004-2005 - Ginny Fowles-Ward (Bowdoin UB)

2005-2006 - Faith Erhardt (UM UB)

2006-2007 - Danette Madore (UMPI UB)

2007-2008 - Steve Visco (UM EOC and ETS)

2008-2009 - Linda Rottmann (UM SSS)

2009-2010 - Sarah Sockalexis (UM ETS)

2010-2011 - Laurie Davis (USM SSS and UB)

2011-2012 - Jess Berry (UMF UB)

2012-2013 - Shawn Graham (UMFK SSS)

2013-2014 - Chris Turner (USM UB)

2014-2015 - Kelly Ilseman (UM UBMS)

2015-2016 - Teri Mann (UM EOC)

2016-2017 - Laurie Davis (USM SSS and UB)

2017-2018 - Dori Fellman (Syntiro GEAR UP)

2018-2019 - Mary Kate Barbosa (UMPI SSS)

2019-2020 - Steve Visco (UM ETS and EOC)

2020-2021 - Mary Sinclair (UMF UB)

2021-2022 - Samantha Prosser (USM UB)

2022-2023 - Terry Charlton (CMCC SSS)

2023-2024 - Ginny Fowles-Ward (Bowdoin UB)

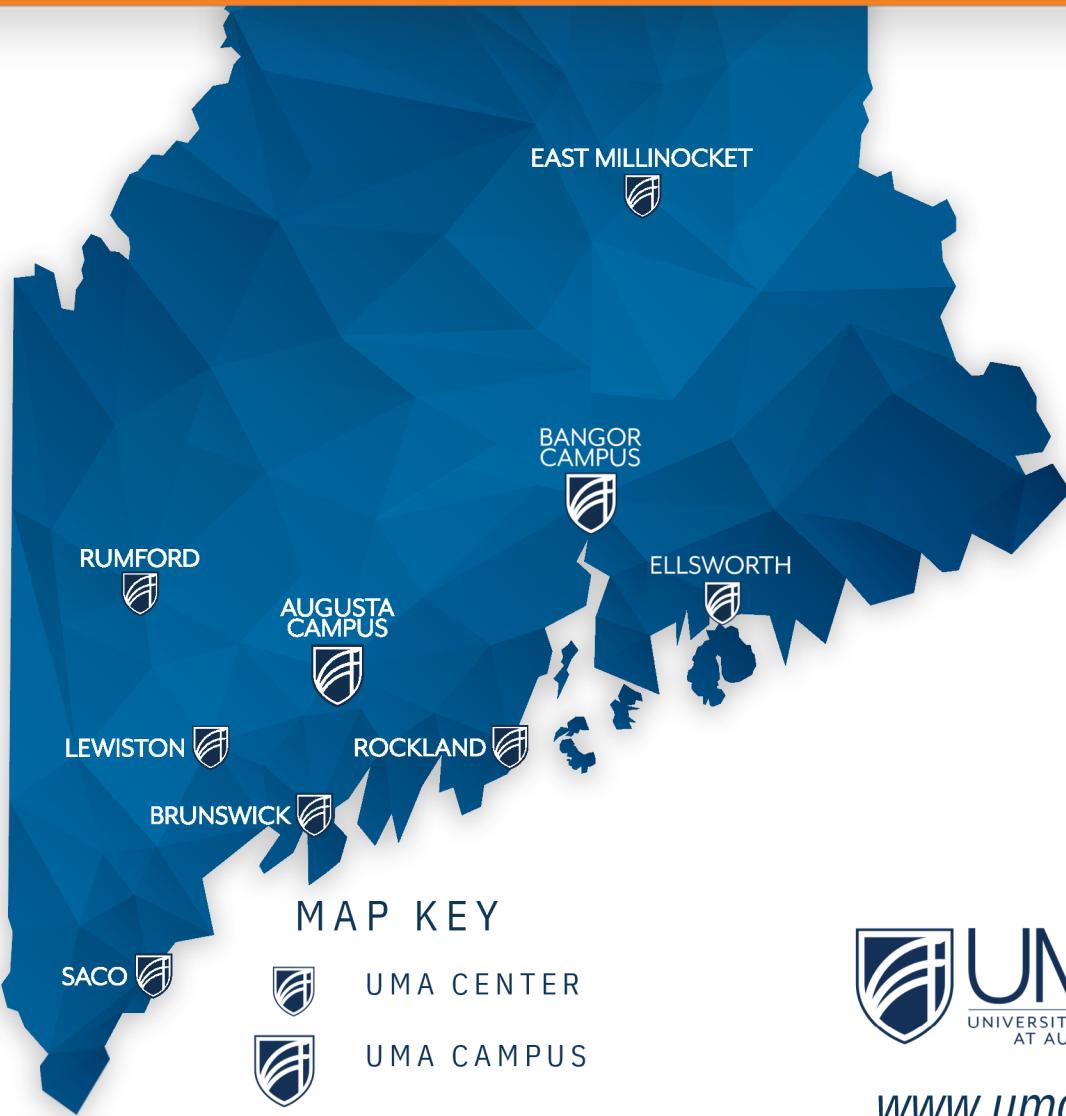
2024-2025 - Michelle Richards (UMPI UB)

2025-2026 - Ashlee Fecteau (UMF SSS)

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