Day 12 of the 12 Days of TRIO

The Final Gift: Project Evaluation Comes Second, for a Reason

Over the past 11 days, every checklist, template, and resource we've shared has been intentionally leading to this final gift: Project Evaluation.

But before we go any further, one last reminder that cannot be skipped.

Compliance comes first. Project evaluation comes second.

A compliance assessment asks:
Are the required forms, files, procedures, and documentation in place and accurate?

A project evaluation asks:
Is the project working as intended, and how well are its major components functioning together?

These are related but not interchangeable. When projects try to evaluate performance before confirming compliance, the results are unreliable at best and misleading at worst.

That's why today's final gift is designed to be used after compliance foundations are in place.

Today's Gift: TRIO Program Evaluation Checklist & Rating Form

This checklist is a practical, structured tool that walks through the major program components typically reviewed during an external process-based evaluation, including:

- Recruitment and Selection
- Assessment of Participant Need
- Service Delivery Plan (Design & Intended Structure)
- Academic and Supportive Services Curriculum & Workshops (Content & Scope)
- Quality, Consistency, and Accessibility of Services (Implementation in Practice)
- Formative and Summative Evaluation Practices
- Project Database Use and Data Management
- Budget Monitoring and Internal Oversight

It allows projects to step back and honestly assess how well each component is functioning, using a clear rating scale that moves beyond "we think we're doing fine" and into evidence-based reflection.

This is something your project can absolutely do on its own. Another department on campus can do it. Your agency can do it internally.

And when you're ready for an external perspective, this is also the exact framework we use in our External Process-Based Evaluations. Our role is not to replace your work, but to build on it by providing analysis, findings, and recommendations grounded in how TRIO projects are expected to operate.

If and when you're ready, you can learn more about those services here: https://www.nosotrosedu.org/external-evaluations

We are scheduling evaluations for late spring and summer, which is often the most strategic time to pause, assess, and make adjustments before the next program year gains momentum.

The real takeaway as we close out the 12 Days of TRIO is this:

Strong projects do not confuse compliance with evaluation. They respect the order, align the work, and let each process do its job.

When that happens, evaluation becomes valuable rather than stressful, and compliance no longer feels like a fire drill. That alignment is the final gift.

And with that, we officially wrap up the 12 Days of TRIO.

From all of us at NEC, we wish you a peaceful holiday season and a successful year ahead.