WEI SYMPOSIUM 2026 Advancing Equity and Student Success

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, MAY 27 – CONSORTIUM MEETING & OPENING RECEPTION

Registration **May 27** **12:00 noon** **Office**	**Registration Desk Opens** Stop by and say hello! Name badges and journals are available at the Registration Office. From 12:30 to 4:00, WEI college representatives will participate in the Consortium Meeting. All other guests are invited to join the Opening Reception, from 4:30 – 6:30 pm.
Consortium Meeting **May 27** **12:30 – 4:00 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Consortium Meeting** (for WEI college representatives) The Consortium Meeting is for representatives of current WEI colleges. The meeting runs 12:30 – 4:00 pm. Meeting sessions are described below. Lunch is available from 12:15 – 1:00 pm.
Consortium Meeting Session **May 27** **12:40 – 1:00 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Consortium Updates** (for WEI college representatives) **Presenters:** Terrance Bond, Assistant to the President, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Heartland Community College Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board Ahja Howard, Director for Program SUCCESS, Illinois Community College Board **Description:** For the Consortium Meeting, ICCB will provide a college roll call, FY27 proposal updates, FY26 grant progress, and information regarding summer/fall plans for Community of Practice programs.
Consortium Meeting Session **May 27** **1:00 – 1:45 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Building Capacity: SNAP Employment & Training Programs** (for WEI college representatives) **Presenters:** Chris Warden, Vice President of Policy and Programs, Women Employed Matt Weis, President and CEO, National Able Network, Inc. Kathi Medcalf, Senior Managing Consultant, Seattle Jobs Initiative **Description:** For the Consortium Meeting, we will provide an overview of a new project. The Lumina Foundation's FutureReady States initiative brings together cohorts from 12 states for guided discussions on ways to improve workforce credentials of value. Several Illinois policy leaders are collaborating on this initiative. ICCB is working with the National Able Network to explore ways that community colleges can expand SNAP Employment &

	Training programs and benefit from federal funding. Join the presenters for an overview of this project.
Breakout **May 27** **2:00 – 2:45 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Spotlight on WEI Healthcare Training Programs: Challenges and Opportunities** **Presenters:** Shameka Davis, Community Health Worker Coordinator/Instructor, Southwestern Illinois College Christine Green, Academic Advisor, Southwestern Illinois College Amy Dennison, Director of Workforce Operations, Illinois Central College Juleya Woodson, Project Manager for the Workforce Empowerment Initiative, Oakton College Jeremy Brown, Pathways Manager, Oakton College **Description:** Three colleges share details on their WEI healthcare training programs. Learn about their effective strategies to offer Community Health Worker, Medical Assistant, Certified Nurse Assistant, Licensed Practical Nurse, Emergency Medical Technician, and related apprenticeships. Presenters will delve into challenges and opportunities around program coordination, recruitment/enrollment efforts, employer partnerships, and supportive services needed to ensure student success.
Breakout **May 27** **2:00 – 2:45 pm** **Redbird G**	**Black Student Next Level Conference: Helping Students Develop Their Leadership Style** **Presenters:** Anne Armbruster, Director of Student Support Services, Lincoln Land Community College Kimberly Wilson, Recruitment Specialist/Black Student Union Advisor, Lincoln Land Community College **Description:** Join Lincoln Land Community College to learn why the Black Student Next Level Leadership Conference is essential for college students—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds. This session reviews how to communicate the conference's purpose to students effectively and how to support them in developing the skills and confidence needed to advance to the next stage of their academic, personal, and professional lives. Presenter will explore key questions that can guide staff in mentoring students. Participants will learn strategies for facilitating conversations and helping students develop important leadership skills.
Breakout **May 27** **2:00 – 2:45 pm** **Redbird F**	**Empowering Students Outside the Classroom: Employability and Financial Skills Workshops** **Presenters:** Theresa Todd, Success Coach/ Case Manager, Black Hawk College Angela Clark, Career Services Coordinator, Black Hawk College **Description:**

	This presentation will walk attendees through Black Hawk College's process of building students' skills outside of the classroom. Our students are required to complete Employability Skills training, resume writing, and financial literacy courses before they complete their WEI training program. These trainings are as essential to their long-term success as the education they are receiving in the classroom.
Consortium Meeting Discussion Groups **May 27** **3:00 – 4:00 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Consortium Discussion Groups** (for WEI college representatives) **Facilitators:** Dr. Akemi Bailey-Haynie, President/CEO, Global Educational Consultants, Inc. Ahja Howard, Director for Program SUCCESS, Illinois Community College Board Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board Dawn Koeltzow, Senior Director, Illinois Central College **Description:** This session will close the WEI Consortium Meeting. Facilitators will guide small group discussions on WEI administrative topics.
Symposium Opening Reception **May 27** **4:30 – 6:30 pm** **Redbird F and Foyer**	**Symposium Opening Reception: Welcome to Uptown! Hosted by Heartland Community College** **Opening Remarks:** Dr. Keith Cornille, President, Heartland Community College **Description:** The Opening Reception is available for all Symposium registrants. Kick off the Symposium with an informal networking opportunity held at the Marriott Conference Center (Redbird F and Foyer). Attire is business casual. Appetizers and refreshments will be served. Cash bar will be available. Opening remarks provided by President Keith Cornille, Heartland Community College.

DAY 2: THURSDAY, MAY 28 – SYMPOSIUM DAY – Open to all Symposium Registrants

Registration **May 28** **8:00 am** **Office**	**Registration Desk Opens** Stop by and say hello! Name badges and journals are available at the Registration Office.
Breakfast **May 28** **8:00 – 9:30 am** **Redbird CD**	**Breakfast & Networking** A breakfast buffet is available for all symposium registrants from 8:00 – 9:30 am.
College Showcase **May 28** **8:50 – 9:20 am** **Foyer**	**WEI College Showcase: Information Tables Available** Visit the exhibit tables in the foyer to meet with representatives from 20 WEI colleges. Learn about their workforce training programs and supportive services available for students.

General Session **May 28** **9:30 – 9:45 am** **Redbird CD**	**Welcome Address: Advancing Equity and Student Success** **Presenters:** Dr. Brian Durham, Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board
General Session **May 28** **9:45 – 10:45 am** **Redbird CD**	**Keynote Speaker: Building Illinois Vibrancy: Community Colleges, Workforce Mobility, and the Future of Shared Prosperity** **Presenter:** Dr. Lenore Rodicio, Incoming President and CEO, Achieving the Dream (ATD) **Facilitator:** Arnitria Karen Shaw-Whitfield, Vice President of Workforce Development and Community Vibrancy, Illinois Central College **Description:** Community colleges across Illinois are strengthening their communities through work tied to student success, workforce development, economic mobility, and regional partnerships. Using Achieving the Dream's Community Vibrancy Framework as a unifying lens, the conversation will explore how the work happening at individual colleges connects to a broader story unfolding across the state. The discussion will highlight the value of alignment across colleges, employers, and communities, and the opportunity to better understand and communicate the collective impact of this work.
Breakout **May 28** **11:00 – 11:45 am** **Redbird E**	**From Barriers to Careers: A Collaborative Model Empowering Women Through Workforce Training** **Presenters:** Tommy Johnson, Assistant Director of WEI, Heartland Community College Nayoka Griffis, Director of WEI, Heartland Community College Mary Campbell, Board of Trustees, Dreams Are Possible Jalessa Owens, Heartland Community College Student and Dreams Are Possible Participant **Description:** This session highlights the partnership between Heartland Community College's Workforce Empowerment Initiative (WEI) and Dreams Are Possible, a community-based organization supporting low-income women pursuing nontraditional, high-wage careers. Together, they have created a seamless pathway that moves participants from community-based career readiness into WEI-supported certificates in advanced manufacturing, industrial technology, and healthcare. Presenters will share how aligned outreach, curriculum bridging, coordinated campus visits, and comprehensive supports reduce systemic barriers and expand opportunities for women in disproportionately impacted communities. Participants will gain insight into how this collaboration strengthens the regional workforce pipeline by increasing exposure to technical careers and supporting confident entry into credentialed programs, demonstrating the transformative impact of equitable, community-driven workforce pathways.

Breakout **May 28** **11:00 – 11:45 am** **Redbird F**	**Finding Your Niche: Pivoting and Building on Collective Assets** **Presenters:** Dr. Truman Hudson, Jr., Executive Director of Workforce Empowerment Initiatives, Olive-Harvey College Dr. Brandon Nichols, Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, Olive-Harvey College Cheryl Freeman, Dean of College to Careers, Olive-Harvey College **Description:** The global, national, and local workforce demands are changing. What made sense today might not make sense tomorrow. To keep up with the constantly shifting workforce, organizations need to be flexible and leverage the collective strengths of their teams, institutions, communities, and regions in real time. This session will provide an overview of how Olive-Harvey College retools its programs to meet industry needs and to address state/federal policy changes affecting students enrolled in WEI.
Breakout **May 28** **11:00 – 11:45 am** **Redbird G**	**From Access to Outcomes: Building a Culture of Care That Drives Equity in Workforce Education** **Presenters:** Bianca Davis, Director of WEI, Rock Valley College Erica Matthews, WEI Student Life Coach, Rock Valley College **Description:** As WEI programs continue to expand access to workforce training across Illinois, the next challenge is ensuring equitable completion and employment outcomes for historically underrepresented students. This session will highlight how Rock Valley College strengthened its WEI implementation by intentionally building a culture of care grounded in equity and cultural awareness. Participants will learn practical strategies for aligning proactive case management, staff training, wrap-around supports, and career accountability systems to support student persistence and workforce mobility. The presentation will share lessons learned, implementation adjustments, and measurable outcomes that demonstrate how structured support systems can help WEI programs move from enrollment-focused models to outcome-driven equity practices. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies adaptable to their own WEI context.
Breakout **May 28** **11:00 – 11:45 am** **Beaufort**	**Helping Students Navigate Professional and Academic Spaces: Building Power, Voice, and Belonging** **Presenters:** Lisa Clanton, Program Navigator, Lincoln Land Community College Cordy Love, Assistant Director, Professional Development and Organizational Culture, John A. Logan College **Description:** Many historically excluded students, especially those preparing to enter professional and academic spaces, will find themselves as the only or one of few underrepresented voices in a room. Join this session to learn from Lincoln Land Community College and John A. Logan College, where student-centered strategies are being used to foster inclusive, empowering environments both inside and outside the classroom.

	At Lincoln Land, a table talk program was implemented to create a supportive space for undergraduate members of Minority Student Organizations to unpack the realities of navigating predominantly white classrooms, offices, internships, and leadership environments. Complementing this work, Cordy Love brings a professional development and organizational culture lens from John A. Logan College, highlighting how institutions can intentionally cultivate spaces where students not only prepare to enter these environments, but also learn to influence and transform them. Through guided discussion, real-world scenarios, and shared reflection, students explore identity, code-switching, confidence, and belonging while learning how to advocate for themselves without losing who they are. The program emphasizes resilience, authenticity, and community-building—reminding students that while they may be the only one in the room, they are never alone in the journey.
Breakout **11:00 – 11:45 am** **May 28** **North Boardroom**	**Roundtable Discussion: College Presidents Meet & Greet with Keynote Speaker Dr. Lenore Rodicio and Dr. Brian Durham** **Presenters:** Dr. Lenore Rodicio, Incoming President and CEO, Achieving the Dream Dr. Brian Durham, Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board **Description:** College Presidents are invited to attend this Meet & Greet with Brian Durham and our Keynote Speaker, Dr. Lenore Rodicio, Incoming President and CEO, Achieving the Dream.
Lunch **May 28** **11:45 – 12:30 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Lunch & Networking** A lunch buffet is available in the foyer and seating is available in Redbird CD.
General Session **May 28** **12:30 – 1:15 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Lunchtime Panel with College Presidents: Leadership Perspectives on the Impact of WEI** **Facilitator:** Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board **Panelists:** President Keith Cornille, Heartland Community College President Lynette Stokes, South Suburban College President Mary-Rita Moore, Triton College **Description:** College presidents discuss the impact of WEI on their institution and local communities.
Breakout **May 28** **1:30 – 2:15 pm**	**Building Stronger Pipelines: Cross-Sector Partnerships That Drive Workforce & Financial Stability**

Redbird E	**Facilitator:** Amy Dennison, Director of Workforce Operations, Illinois Central College **Panelists:** Janice Parker, Workforce Manager, Illinois Central College Brittany Strickland, Vice President Community Manager, JP Morgan Chase Bank Sarai Garza, Senior Program Officer, LISC **Description:** Community colleges are an essential part of improving economic mobility, but training is only the beginning. This interactive breakout session delves into the ways in which workforce departments can effectively collaborate with financial institutions and community financial organizations to improve student outcomes. Attendees will gain insight into effective models of collaboration that combine financial literacy, coaching, and capital access into the workforce development offerings. Take home strategies for collaboration, implementation, and measurable outcomes to improve student persistence and success in the workforce.
Breakout **May 28** **1:30 – 2:15 pm** **Redbird F**	**Journey with Us: From Progress to Student Success** **Presenter:** Anita Clemons, WEI Project Manager, South Suburban College **Description:** Student success is not defined by a single outcome, but by measurable progress along the educational journey. By intentionally tracking academic, engagement, and persistence milestones, we ensure students remain on a clear and supported path toward their goals. Explore the ways WEI addresses these barriers and creates intentional pathways that move students from progress to success.
Breakout **May 28** **1:30 – 2:15 pm** **Redbird G**	**College Equity Planning** **Presenters:** Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board Ahja Howard, Director of Program SUCCESS, Illinois Community College Board Dr. Akemi Bailey-Haynie, President/CEO, Global Educational Consultants, Inc. **Description:** This presentation highlights the equitable practices being planned and implemented at community colleges across the state of Illinois.
Breakout **May 28** **1:30 – 2:15 pm** **Beaufort**	**Turning Academic Success into a Team Sport: The WEI Buddy Race Model** **Presenters:** Jesus Lopez, Completion and Transition Specialist, Triton College Devlin Collins, Completion and Transition Specialist, Triton College **Description:**

	This presentation highlights how Triton College's WEI program transformed academic accountability into a collaborative and motivating system through the Buddy Race Model, where students compete within programs to achieve the highest collective GPA. The session demonstrates how friendly competition, peer accountability, and public recognition (such as the live leaderboard) motivate students to stay engaged and maintain strong academic performance.
Breakout **May 28** **1:30 – 2:15 pm** **North Boardroom**	**Roundtable Discussion: WEI Consortium Data and Estimating Economic Impact** **Presenter:** Dawn Koeltzow, Senior Director, Illinois Central College **Description:** Join this informal session to discuss ways to use WEI data to advocate for your program. Handouts will be reviewed including the newly released Six Year Outcomes brochure as well as the Estimating Economic Impact brochure with statewide impact data and individual college results.
General Session **May 28** **2:30 – 3:15 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Closing Session: ICCB Update on Workforce Pell** **Presenter:** Whitney Thompson, Deputy Director for Workforce Education, Illinois Community College Board **Description:** In this session, Whitney Thompson, Deputy Director for Workforce Education, will provide an update on Workforce Pell and Illinois' work to respond to the upcoming expansion of the federal Pell Grant program that would allow eligible students to use Pell funding for high-quality, short-term workforce programs. Led by the Governor's Office, ICCB is working with other state education and workforce agencies to create an approval process that maximizes access to high-quality programs while maintaining consumer protection.
General Session **May 28** **3:20 – 3:30 pm** **Redbird CD**	**Closing Remarks** Thank you for attending the WEI Symposium! A post-conference evaluation form will be sent to all registered guests.

SYMPOSIUM PRESENTED BY: The Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Central College, Heartland Community College, and the Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support. Please direct any questions to: Dawn Koeltzow, Senior Director, WEI Consortium, dawn.koeltzow@icc.edu

PRESENTER SLIDES & HANDOUTS: https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu/events/wei-symposium

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