



Vocation across the Academy Grants

Invitation for Applications

Deadline: April 5, 2024

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) invites member institutions of its Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE) that meet certain requirements to apply for grants that will expand the institution's ongoing program for vocational exploration and discernment. The goal of the program is to strengthen the institution's capacity, and broaden its engagement, in supporting undergraduate students who are discerning their many callings in life.

The Opportunity

One major purpose of a liberal arts education is to help students shape a philosophy of life. At the same time, today's undergraduates (and their parents) are increasingly preoccupied with postgraduate employment. The purpose of this grant program is to help colleges and universities develop more effective ways to strengthen the link between these two aspects of undergraduate education. It is designed to support institutions in their efforts to expand vocational exploration and discernment programs across the curriculum and co-curricular programs—whether by distributing these programs more evenly across academic disciplines and professional fields, by broadening this work across all four years of the undergraduate experience, or by otherwise expanding the range of students who come into contact with these programs.

The Council of Independent Colleges is grateful to Lilly Endowment Inc. for its generous support of this program.

The purposes of this grant program are: (a) to help students develop more effective links between their emerging philosophy of life and career preparation; (b) to include more faculty and students in activities that promote vocational reflection and discernment; and, in some cases, (c) to build connections between colleges and community partners, such as local businesses, nonprofits, or other civic and cultural organizations in the vicinity, in order to deepen the institution's engagement with the goals of the grant program.

Tensions between study of the liberal arts and professional preparation are not new, but the need for better ways of reconciling them has become more urgent. While vocational exploration programs show great promise in addressing this tension, the challenge is to develop—through reexamination of the curriculum, co-curriculum, and advising programs—a framework for vocational exploration that will remain durable as both the liberal arts and the professions continue to evolve.

CIC invites proposals from member colleges and universities to develop institution-wide undergraduate initiatives that expand vocational exploration across the liberal arts and applied professional fields. This expansion may be focused on course offerings, co-curricular programming, efforts that connect students to the local community, or any other aspect of the student experience. Proposals may focus on upper-level undergraduates, lower-division study, or both. Initiatives that seek to integrate vocational reflection and discernment as a continuum from the first year through the senior year are especially encouraged.

Examples of programs that show promise for funding through a Vocation across the Academy grant include:

- Expansion of approaches to vocational reflection that are not limited to a particular profession and are informed by knowledge of likely career trajectories;
- Improved integration of advising throughout the undergraduate years, including support for reflective and effective transitions into college and from college into graduate study or the workforce;
- Efforts that help form the vocational commitments of students in conversation with significant texts in philosophy, history, literature, and theology, and in ways that prepare them for ethical professional practices;
- Strengthened career services programming through partnership with local organizations throughout the undergraduate years; and
- Integration of vocational exploration with active learning through academic internships, community engaged learning, and undergraduate research.

Vocation across the Academy grants will be awarded based on proposals that explain (a) the purpose and goals of the proposed activities and their relationship to the institution's ongoing vocational exploration programs, (b) the extent of institutional support for vocational exploration efforts to date, (c) the proposed enhancements this grant would support, and (d) the ways in which the NetVUE-supported program would be sustained by the institution for at least one year beyond the grant period.

Funding Plan

Vocation across the Academy grants are intended to support projects that last a minimum of four years. Grant funding supports the first three years of the project; however, applications must describe a four-year plan that includes funding from institutional sources for the fourth year. In the project's first year, grant funding of up to \$30,000 will be awarded. Recipients will be required to raise third-party matching gifts in an amount equal to the initial award by the end of the first year. Upon fulfillment of the matching requirement, the institution will receive a bonus award equal to the initial award amount (up to \$30,000), to be used toward project costs in the grant's second and third years. Thus, the entire funding from CIC and third-party sources may be up to \$90,000 for the three years of grant-supported work.

The matching requirement is intended to help institutions secure new donors and encourage previous donors to fund new projects. Donors must specifically designate matching gifts to support activities proposed for the project, and matching funds must be received by the end of the first year. Pledges are not sufficient, nor may previously received gifts be repurposed to count toward the third-party match. Institutions are expected to use this grant to increase their capacity to sustain such programs, through a firm commitment to support a fourth year of activity (including a budget for this fourth year that relies entirely on institutional funds).

Examples of allowable expenses include (a) released time for one or more project leaders to coordinate the activities of this grant, (b) mini-grants for instructors to design new courses, (c) workshops or retreats for faculty members and staff members, (d) reading materials and similar resources for use during the grant period, and (e) student events led by campus leaders and/or community partners, including reading materials and refreshments for these events. For examples of allowable expenses, as well as those which are ineligible for grant support, please consult the Grant Budget Guidelines document on the NetVUE website.

Special Initiative: Vocation across the Academy Community Partnerships

CIC will award additional Vocation across the Academy grants for proposals that focus on building partnerships within the local community. Vocation across the Academy grants with this focus have the same eligibility rules and application procedures, but may be requested for amounts up to \$35,000, with an expectation of a donor match and a potential bonus award of the same amount, for a total of up to \$105,000 in CIC and third-party funding.

This additional opportunity within the Vocation across the Academy grant program is designed to help colleges and universities strengthen the link between career preparation and one's philosophy of life through partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and civic and cultural organizations. The goal of these partnerships is to help students consider the larger community context within which they hope to live out their callings—not only in terms of career and professional preparation, but also with respect to issues of meaning, purpose, and identity.

Proposals may focus on first-year or upper-division students and may build relationships with partner organizations through academic departments, campus ministry, career services, or other

relevant campus offices. Proposals that foster collaboration among offices within the university in support of these community partnerships are especially encouraged.

Eligibility and Funding Timeline

NetVUE members are eligible for this grant program if, at the time of application, they do not hold (nor have already been awarded and are about to hold) a NetVUE Professional Development Award or Program Development Grant. If the member has held a previous Vocation across the Academy Grant, two additional eligibility conditions apply: that grant must have been completed by June 30, 2021, and the institution must submit an additional report indicating how the project supported by that grant is being sustained.

This is the seventh round of Vocation across the Academy grants; in the previous six rounds, CIC awarded grants to 80 NetVUE member institutions. The application deadline for this round is **April 5, 2024**. Decisions will be announced in June 2024. Funds will be released in July 2024 for use over a three-year period (July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2027). An interim report and documentation of receipt of matching funds is due by May 31, 2025; after approval, matching grant funds will be released. All spending from grant and donor funds must be completed by June 30, 2027.

Expectations of Grant Recipients

If awarded a NetVUE Vocation across the Academy Grant, the institution will agree to:

- Submit written annual progress and budget reports to CIC—the first of which is due May 31, 2025 (late in the first year of the grant). This report must include documentation of matching funds received during the grant’s first year (following the guidelines provided in the grant agreement form). A second interim report is due by June 13, 2026;
- Participate in efforts by CIC and NetVUE to assess grant-funded activities, including (but not limited to) participation in surveys, virtual focus groups, and virtual gatherings of grant directors;
- Provide final narrative and financial reports to CIC by August 28, 2027, describing the outcome of the project, including a reflection on the effectiveness of its initiatives;
- Submit a final narrative report on the project’s fourth year of institutionally supported activities, including a description of future plans for the project, by July 30, 2028;
- Permit the inclusion of information about its project in CIC and NetVUE publications;
- Be willing to share, at future NetVUE conferences and gatherings, and by means of a one-page summary to be posted on the NetVUE website, what the institution has learned through its grant-supported activities;
- Identify the funded activities as supported by the Council of Independent Colleges and Lilly Endowment Inc. in all project materials and publicity;

- Maintain membership in NetVUE throughout the full four years of the project; and
- Send a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another officer at the vice-presidential level to the 2026 and 2028 NetVUE Conferences.

Application Guidelines

Proposals should be submitted online as a single document and consist of the following components. Please use a 12-point font and standard 1-inch margins for legibility.

A One-Paragraph Executive Summary of the Proposal (one half page maximum)

A Brief Public Description of the project (120 words, maximum), which will be posted on the NetVUE website if the project is funded. Please consult earlier examples, which may be found in the listings of previously awarded grants on the NetVUE website.

A Four- to Five-Page Narrative with sections that correspond to the following points:

- The institution’s understanding of vocation as it relates to its campus mission and how this understanding guides its current vocational exploration and discernment programs, as well as their proposed development across the academy (and with community partner(s), if applying through the Community Partnership initiative);
- A description of both the challenges and the opportunities that the grant would address in the institution’s program for vocational exploration;
- A description of the institution’s strategy for encouraging program participation among students across demographic and socio-economic categories, with special attention to student groups that have traditionally been underrepresented, marginalized, or otherwise unable to participate in vocational exploration programs;
- For proposals submitted under the Community Partnership initiative, a description of the challenges and the opportunities that the grant would address in developing partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and/or cultural organizations, and how these partnerships might foster vocational reflection and discernment among students;
- A statement of project goals that can be referenced and assessed both during and at the end of the grant period to evaluate project success, along with a description of indicators that would demonstrate that these goals have been met, as well as a plan for assessment and evaluation of the project, both during and following its implementation;
- A description of proposed activities during the grant period;
- A description of the institution’s strategy for raising the required donor match;
- A statement of the institution’s willingness to share outcomes, lessons learned, and newfound expertise gained through grant activities at future NetVUE events; and

- A statement of how the institution will continue the enhanced vocation initiative during the project's fourth year, after the three-year funding period has concluded.

A One-Page Project Timeline

A One-Page Roster that lists the names and contact information for (a) the principal project contact; (b) the senior (cabinet-level) administrator who will oversee the project; (c) the project's leaders, including short descriptions of their qualifications for the specified roles; (d) the advancement officer who will work with project leaders to raise the required matching funds; and (e) any other individuals who will help carry out the project, including a one-sentence description of each person's role. **Note:** Institutions that currently hold a NetVUE Grant for Reframing the Institutional Saga and/or a Grant for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith should clearly explain how staffing responsibilities and other resources will be distributed in ways that would allow all NetVUE-funded projects (whether new or ongoing) to succeed.

A Concise Budget for all four project years, to include allocation of all grant and matching funds during the three-year grant period as well as institutional funds to be used in support of the project over its four-year span. Budgets should list the expense categories for each year of the project separately, including programmatic expenses, faculty and staff stipends or released time, honoraria for speakers and/or writers, meals and travel for meetings, and costs of materials and supplies. Budgets should clearly distinguish grant funds, matching funds, and institutional contributions in each line item. Applicants are expected to follow rigorously the rules about eligible expenses and the construction of the budget, in the **Grant Budget Guidelines** document on the NetVUE website. This important document provides answers to frequently asked questions and a sample budget; please study it carefully in the construction of the budget.

A Letter of Support from the president indicating the institution's commitment to sustain the activities that would be supported with a NetVUE grant during and after the project period and designating a member of the president's cabinet to oversee this project. The letter also should affirm the institution's commitment to continue NetVUE membership throughout the grant period and to send a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another officer at the vice-presidential level to the 2026 and 2028 NetVUE Conferences.

Application Deadline

The application deadline is **April 5, 2024**. Proposals and supporting materials should be submitted electronically as a single document via the portal on the NetVUE website. Proposals can be considered only if they are submitted through this system.

Questions?

Questions about NetVUE Vocation across the Academy grants (including the Community Partnership initiative) should be addressed to Carter Aikin, NetVUE grant director, at caikin@cic.edu or (217) 854-5619.