



Professional Development Awards

Invitation for Applications

One-year awards of up to \$25,000

Deadline: April 10, 2026



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

Professional Development Awards

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) invites colleges and universities that are members of its Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE) to apply for a one-year Professional Development Award in the amount of \$15,000 to \$20,000 (or up to \$25,000 for those applying under the special initiative described below). This grant is intended to support on-campus professional development activities for faculty members and staff, with the goal of increasing the institution's capacity to support its undergraduate students as they explore their many callings and discern their future vocations.

The Opportunity

The collegiate experience can provide students with the time, space, and opportunities needed to explore the full range of possibilities for their future directions in life. NetVUE member institutions are committed to supporting their students in their vocational journeys, but many faculty members and staff may not have had adequate opportunities to develop their own capacities to offer such support. Through its NetVUE Professional Development Awards, CIC seeks to offer expertise, guidance, and funding to member institutions as they develop and sustain programming to help educators support their students' work in this area. Through an optional special initiative (described below), CIC seeks to support institutions that seek to ensure that all students have access to vocation-related programming.

NetVUE Professional Development Awards may be requested in amounts ranging from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for use over one year. Funds should be designated for activities that enhance the knowledge, skills, capacity, and expertise of staff and faculty members in support of vocational exploration and discernment among undergraduates. Grant funds may be used for a range of purposes, but some expenses are ineligible; applicants are expected to attend carefully to the Grant Budget Guidelines on the NetVUE website.

Examples of programs that might be considered include (but are not limited to):

- Materials, speakers, and/or refreshments for gatherings of faculty members and staff leaders who read and discuss key texts to expand the vocabulary and frameworks for helping students wrestle with questions about their callings;
- A retreat for faculty members, student services staff, and/or administrators to explore the range of intellectual resources (historical, theological, ethical, and affective) that support the institution's mission and identity and bear on its commitments to its students' vocational exploration and discernment; or
- A series of workshops in which campus leaders learn about effective strategies for advising and mentoring students as they consider their future directions in life.

In the first twelve rounds of Professional Development Awards, CIC awarded 287 grants to NetVUE member institutions. Brief descriptions of the programming undertaken by previous recipients of NetVUE grants may be found on the NetVUE website by navigating to the particular grant and clicking on the button marked "View Previous Grant Awards."

Grants will be awarded based on proposals that explain (a) the institution's professional development needs and the relationship of those needs to vocational exploration at their institution;

(b) the purpose and plan of proposed activities; (c) the ways that this NetVUE-supported program would enhance the institution's capacity to support and sustain vocational exploration and discernment efforts after the grant period; and (d) clear plans for assessing the efficacy of proposed activities for increasing knowledge, skill, and capacity for better educating undergraduates through the lens of vocation.

Special Initiative

Broadening Participation in Vocation Programming

CIC will offer the NetVUE Professional Development Award at a higher level of funding, for projects that build institutional capacity for creating vocation-related programming designed to reach a broader range of students. While all applicants for NetVUE grants are expected to encourage broad participation and to seek wide-ranging outcomes (available to all students) in grant-funded activities, some member institutions may wish to focus their work more intensively in this area. Proposals submitted under this initiative have the same eligibility rules as the general award, but funding may be requested up to \$25,000.

Statistical and anecdotal evidence suggests that students in various demographic and socio-cultural categories participate in vocational exploration and discernment programs at markedly different rates. Many NetVUE member institutions have sought opportunities to examine more closely the reasons for these differences and to encourage participation among all students. Institutions applying under this special initiative are expected to have some level of vocation-related programming for students already in place. The proposal should demonstrate the institution's desire and willingness to deepen its understanding of present patterns of student participation and to assure a broader reach and greater attention to reaching all students through their programming related to vocation and calling.

Eligibility and Funding Timeline

All NetVUE member colleges and universities are eligible to apply for funding, provided that, at the time of application, they do not hold (nor have already been awarded and are about to hold) a NetVUE Vocation across the Academy Grant or Program Development Grant. If the member has previously held a NetVUE Professional Development Award, that grant must have been concluded no later than December 31, 2023.

The application deadline for this round is **April 10, 2026**. Decisions will be announced in June 2026, with funds disbursed in July for use between July 15, 2026, and July 15, 2027. Spending must be completed by July 15, 2027.

Expectations of Grant Recipients

If awarded a NetVUE Professional Development Award, the institution will agree to::

- ☐ Submit final narrative and financial reports to CIC by August 31, 2027, which describe the outcome of the project and reflect on the effectiveness of the initiatives during the grant period;
- ☐ Participate in efforts by CIC and NetVUE to assess, coach, and advise grant-funded activities, including (but not limited to) participation in surveys, virtual focus groups, and virtual gatherings of grant directors;

- ☐ Permit the inclusion of information about its professional development initiative 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; and
- ☐ Maintain membership in NetVUE through at least the 2027 calendar year.

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. Proposals include the following elements, in this order and clearly labeled as such:

- ☐ **A Brief Public Description** of the project (120 words, maximum), to be posted on the NetVUE website if the project is funded, providing a concise account of the planned project that will be understandable to those who have not read the proposal. Examples may be found in the listings of previously awarded grants on the NetVUE website.
- ☐ **A Two- to Three-Page Narrative** that provides, in clearly marked sections in this order:
 - A description of professional development needs and their connection to the institution's vocational exploration efforts;
 - A statement of project goals and objectives that can be assessed at the end of the grant period to evaluate project success, including a plan for such assessment (with evidence of support for assessment efforts included as part of the grant budget);
 - A description of proposed activities to be undertaken during the grant period, as well as proposed resources and materials to be used in this effort. (Campuses are encouraged to propose the use of books, articles, blog posts, podcasts, and other resources that will resonate with their campus culture, history, and present needs; applicants newer to the scholarship of vocation are encouraged to consider the wide array of resources described on the NetVUE website as a starting point);
 - A description of strategies for encouraging broad participation across demographic and socio-economic categories (both in planned professional development activities and in future programming for students that may arise from this work);
 - If applying under the special initiative, a brief account of (a) current participation levels in vocation-related work among students from various demographic and socio-cultural groups; (b) the vocation-related needs of those who are participating at lower levels; (c) any previous efforts to broaden student participation; and (d) how the proposed activities might lead to broader participation;
 - A statement of how the institution will benefit from the professional development initiative after the grant period; and
 - A statement of the institution's willingness to share outcomes, lessons learned, and newfound expertise gained through grant activities at future NetVUE Conferences, regional/topical gatherings, online events, and/or other venues.

☐ **A One-Page Project Timeline**

☐ **A One-Page Roster of Project Leaders**

- A list of names and contact information (including phone number and email address) for
 - the principal project contact (the person leading grant-funded activities, not the institution's grants administrator);
 - the senior (cabinet-level) administrator who will oversee the project; and
 - other individuals who will lead and/or 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 would be distributed in ways that would allow all NetVUE-funded projects (whether new or ongoing) to succeed, as well as explaining how the two grant-funded projects will relate to each other and any ways that they may intersect.

- ☐ **A One-Page Budget with Budget Notes** that describes the expense categories, including program expenses, faculty and staff stipends or released time, honoraria for speakers, meals and travel for meetings, and costs of materials and supplies. If the institution is contributing financial support to the project, the budget should list this support in a separate column. (Such contributions are not required for this grant, but they can help to demonstrate the institution's commitment to supporting the project.) Applicants are expected to follow rigorously the rules about eligible expenses and the construction of the budget, which are provided 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.

Please Note: Budgets must include support for robust assessment efforts (led by someone outside the leadership roster and, if possible, outside the institution), yielding a written report that tracks and explains progress on specific expected outcomes. Budgets must also include support for the project leader(s), preferably through buyouts of time—i.e., funding other employees (adjunct instructors or staff members) to perform the project leaders' contracted duties—in order to ensure that project leaders have adequate time and space to bring the grant-funded project to fruition. Budgets should not allocate fractional time of any employee's work without a clear description of who will take up that percentage of duties and how that person will be compensated.

- ☐ **A Letter of Support** from the president or chief academic officer supporting the proposed project and affirming plans to continue NetVUE membership through the grant's duration.

Application Deadline

The application deadline is **April 10, 2026**. Proposals should be submitted electronically as a single document via the portal on the NetVUE website. Proposals must be submitted through this system to be considered.

Questions?

Questions about NetVUE Professional Development Awards (including the Diversity and Inclusion initiative) should be addressed to Robert Pampel, NetVUE grant program officer, at rpampel@cic.edu.