



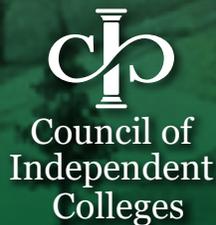
Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education

# Grants Reframing the Institutional Saga

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## Invitation for Applications

Deadline: August 7, 2026



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

# Grants for Reframing the Institutional Saga

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) invites colleges and universities that are members of its Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE), and that meet certain requirements, to apply for grants that will lead to an updated account of their history, mission, and institutional vocation in light of the institution's current context.

## The Opportunity

Many NetVUE member colleges and universities have strong historical ties to a specific religious tradition, a particular educational philosophy, or a pioneering educator. These elements of an institution's heritage are important, but their significance may not always be clear in the midst of changes in its demographic profile, its surrounding community, and its founding organizations. These changes can influence student recruitment and retention, curriculum design, and the composition of the faculty. Colleges and universities seek to give adequate attention both to their institutional heritage and history, and to the changed circumstances in which they now operate.

CIC invites proposals from NetVUE member colleges and universities that are seeking to re-examine and reframe their commitments in ways that attend not only to their history, identity, and heritage, but also to their present circumstances. This re-examination would enable institutions to articulate the ties between their inheritance from the past and the vocations that situate them within their current context and call them into the future. By the end of the grant period, recipients are expected to have created one or more enduring products, such as a book (whether a monograph or a collection of essays), a permanent campus exhibit accompanied by a printed catalogue, or some other physical and durable record of the results of campus conversations, efforts in critical thinking, and the entire reframing process. The enduring product(s) may be supported by other products (including digital and electronic ones) that reflect deep research and that may help extend the reach of the project, but digital-only projects are not permitted (more on this point below).

NetVUE Grants for Reframing the Institutional Saga may be requested **in amounts up to \$60,000** for use over three years. Examples of allowable expenses include (a) funds to support retreats, workshops, and similar events to gather a range of perspectives on the institutional saga; (b) released time or stipends for researchers and writers who might collaborate on the project; (c) reading materials and other resources for use during the grant period; and (d) released time for one or more project leaders to coordinate the activities of this grant. Grant funds may be used for a range of purposes, but some expenses are ineligible for grant support; for details, grant writers are expected to pay **careful attention to the Grant Budget Guidelines** document on the NetVUE website. Budget documents that fail to follow these guidelines may lead to the proposal not being entered into the review process.

Grants will be awarded based on proposals that explain (a) the purpose and goals of the proposed project, including the institution's account of the relationship between its historical mission and its current context; (b) the extent of institutional support for vocational exploration efforts to date; (c) a clear account of the work that the institution plans to undertake, including specific goals for these efforts, a clear indication of how the attainment of these goals will be assessed, and a description of the final product(s) that the work is expected to generate; and (d) the ways in which the project's outcomes would continue to shape the institution beyond the grant period. Note: the recent increase in the maximum award for this grant comes with an expectation that proposed budgets will reflect

**adequate released time for project participants and significant attention to assessment** (including the use of external evaluators). Additionally, applications are expected to name a faculty member as a “primary researcher” who will have overall responsibility for the integrity of the reframing process and the completion of the enduring product.

While NetVUE institutions should certainly seek to celebrate successes of the past, this grant program is not primarily for that purpose. These grants are intended to support a process not only of recalling and narrating the past, but also of actively and critically re-examining and reframing it—engaging the academic community and its constituents in a process of institutional introspection. This process of careful thought and reframing should be extensive enough to be worthy of capturing and preserving in a physical product of enduring value.

Because this grant program is intended to lead to durable products that capture this moment in the institution’s process of reflection, projects that propose digital-only products (e.g., websites, digital archives, or audio-visual resources) will not be considered unless accompanied by durable products that provide some check on the volatility of the digital product(s). Similarly, a final product that can only be accessed at a particular site (e.g., a permanent exhibit on campus) would need to be accompanied by a catalogue of the exhibition or other physical product that would not require travelling to campus to encounter it.

Because institutions often require additional time to map out the details of their reframing process (at the beginning of the grant period), as well as time at the end to finalize the creation of the durable products, this grant program has a three-part structure: a six-month “ramp up” period, followed by a two -year period of project activities, and concluding with a six-month completion phase, during which the durable product is expected to come to fruition (i.e., by being published, constructed, or otherwise finalized).

During the ramp-up period, grantees are expected to schedule additional planning meetings among the principal project leaders, finalize a list of contributors to the project, and similar activities. Toward the end of this six-month period, grantees will schedule an informal check-in with the NetVUE grants director to report on the overall state of the project. An interim report is due approximately one year later, after one year of full-scale project activities (which is also the half-way point of the three-year grant period). One year after that, the project is expected to be completed; an additional six-month period is allocated for publication or construction.

A variety of approaches will be considered as part of the process to produce an updated institutional saga, including:

- Support for one or more faculty members to reframe, rethink, and update the institution’s history, tracing the thread of institutional vocation from its founding to the current time;
- Programs to broaden conversations (which might include faculty members, administrators, trustees, students, and graduates) about the institution’s identity and purpose, with particular attention to incorporating the contemporary educational context into earlier works describing the founding mission; and/or
- Support for a group of faculty members, staff, and administrators to incorporate the project’s outcomes into the institution’s strategic plan.

## Eligibility and Funding Timeline

All NetVUE member institutions that have not completed, and do not currently hold, a Grant for Reframing the Institutional Saga are eligible to apply for this award. Note: If an institution currently holds any other NetVUE grant (or expects to apply for one in the near future), the application must demonstrate that staffing and other resources are adequately distributed to allow both projects to succeed. Ordinarily this will require that the programs supported by the two grants be directed by distinct leadership teams.

This is the seventh round of NetVUE Grants for Reframing the Institutional Saga. In the first six rounds, grants were awarded to 100 NetVUE member institutions. **The application deadline is August 8, 2026.** Decisions will be announced in December 2026. Funds will be disbursed in two payments: the first half in February 2027, and the second half in late summer 2028 (following the approval of an interim report). Spending must be completed by January 31, 2030.

## Expectations of Grant Recipients

If awarded a NetVUE Grant for Reframing the Institutional Saga, the institution will agree to:

- Schedule an informal check-in with a member of the NetVUE grants team for the faculty member serving as principal researcher (as well the principal project director if that is a different person), between June 1, 2027, and August 1, 2027—that is, toward the end of the six-month ramp-up period;
- Submit a written progress and budget report to CIC by June 15, 2028—that is, nearing the grant’s half-way point (required for the second half of funding to be released);
- Provide final narrative and financial reports to CIC by March 1, 2030, over the signature of the president, describing the outcomes of the project, the degree to which project goals were met, the effectiveness of the work, and directions for the future;
- Compose and disseminate several “stories of success” about their reframing process (described elsewhere in this document), shared with internal and external constituencies, and provided to NetVUE as a one-page document for posting on its website;
- Participate in efforts by CIC and NetVUE to assess grant-funded activities, including (but not limited to) surveys, virtual focus groups, and gatherings of grant directors, making use of the data that will be supplied from these activities (as well as from internal and external assessment efforts) in grant reports, in order to document the degree to which project goals were met and initiatives proved effective;
- Provide NetVUE with two copies of the final product(s) created through grant funding;
- Permit the inclusion of information about its project in CIC and NetVUE publications;
- 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 all calendar years during which the grant is in process (minimally, calendar years 2027–2030); and
- Send a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another officer at the cabinet level to the next NetVUE Conference (three-person teams attend with only a nominal registration fee; costs for accommodation and meals are waived).

## Application Guidelines

Proposals should be submitted online as a single document. For the benefit of grant reviewers, please use a standard 12-point font with reasonable margins, such that the proposal may be printed if necessary. It should consist of the following elements:

- An Executive Summary of the Proposal** (one 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; examples may be found in the lists of previously awarded grants on the NetVUE website.
- A Five- to Six-Page Narrative** that provides clearly marked sections that correspond to the following points:
  - The institution’s understanding of its religious, philosophical, or cultural identity and heritage, as well as how this understanding informs the institution’s current mission;
  - A list of published (or otherwise broadly available) histories of the institution and a comment about their limitations as contemporary descriptions of the institution’s saga;
  - The institution’s understanding of how its mission and sense of vocation relate to its current context (for example, with respect to prospective student applicants, surrounding community, and/or relationships with other constituencies and stakeholders);
  - A statement of project goals that can be referenced and assessed—both during and at the end of the two-year grant period—as a basis for evaluating project success;
  - A description of proposed activities to be undertaken and of the final written product(s) that is (are) expected to be created and disseminated during the grant period;
  - A description of the institution’s strategy for encouraging broad participation in this project across demographic and socio-economic categories (not only in activities related to reframing the institutional saga, but also in any future programming that may arise from this work), and in particular, for building institutional capacity to promote participation among underrepresented, disadvantaged, or marginalized groups;
  - A description of how the institution plans to share its “stories of success” (as described elsewhere in this document) with its internal and external constituencies, as well as with NetVUE;
  - A statement of how the institution anticipates using the materials produced through this grant initiative to inform its future identity, institutional vocation and mission, and vocation-related programming; and
  - A plan for assessment and evaluation of the project’s goals and objectives—both during and at the end of the grant period—describing the assessment instruments that will be used to evaluate the degree to which each program element met its stated goals. At least a portion of this work should be carried out by evaluators who are external to the institution, and the proposed budget should reflect this plan.
- A One-Page Project Timeline** generally structured along these lines:
  - A six-month planning period in which writing/researching teams outline upcoming work,

- contract expenses (i.e., printing or installation costs), and agree on core principles for research, inquiry, and dissemination;
  - A two-year period in which research and inquiry into the past is conducted and enduring products finalized;
  - A final, six-month period in which enduring products receive final editing and are published, installed, or otherwise reach their finalized form for display or distribution.
- **Plans for Telling Stories of Success.** CIC is confident that institutions receiving these grants will achieve meaningful and lasting outcomes, deepening their understanding of their heritage and of their ongoing vocation as an institution. The durable products produced will tell an important story, but another story needs to be told as well: an account of how the institution went about producing this work. Hence, proposals should describe a plan to document and narrate their work with attention to two key audiences: (a) constituencies internal to the institution (beyond those already participating in grant-supported activities) and (b) constituencies external to your institution (in ways that go beyond general promotion, marketing, and/or cultivation of donors). A brief description of this “storytelling” plan should be included in the grant proposal, as noted elsewhere in this document.

Some suggestions for effectively fulfilling this requirement will be provided after the grant is awarded; however, applicants are encouraged to think creatively (when constructing the proposal) as to how this requirement might be met. This will put them in a better position to develop and disseminate stories of success when the grant period concludes. By making plans now as to how they will tell the story of their grant-funded projects, grantees will be better prepared to highlight the accomplishments of their work—helping to inform not only the entire campus, but also the wider community, about the unfolding vocation of the institution.

- **A One-Page Roster** that lists the names and contact information for:
- the principal project leader (this person should be directly involved in grant-funded activities and is expected to be named as the primary contact if a grant is awarded);
  - the primary faculty researcher (this person will often be the same as the principal project leader);
  - the senior (cabinet-level) administrator who will oversee the project;
  - the project’s other leaders, including short descriptions of their qualifications for the specified roles; and
  - other individuals who will help carry out the project, including a one-sentence description of each person’s role. If the institution currently holds another NetVUE grant, the roster should make clear how staffing responsibilities and other resources are to be distributed in ways that would allow both projects to succeed.
- **A Concise Budget** (typically two to three pages), as an Excel spreadsheet, along with **Budget Notes** as a Word document, formatted as described in the Grant Budget Guidelines. It should describe the main expense categories, including programmatic expenses, faculty and staff stipends or released time, honoraria for speakers and/or writers, any travel-related expenses, and costs of materials and supplies. Grant writers are **required** to read carefully the Grant Budget Guidelines, available on the NetVUE website, which include answers to frequently asked questions, a sample budget, and budget notes.

- **A Letter of Support** from the president indicating the institution's commitment to the project and a description of the ways that the work that would be supported by the grant is expected to be incorporated into its long-term planning and its mission-focused activities. In addition, the letter should designate a member of the president's cabinet to oversee this project. It should also affirm the institution's commitment to continue NetVUE membership throughout the grant period and to sending a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another cabinet-level officer to the next national NetVUE Conference.

## Application Deadline

The application deadline is **August 7, 2026**. Proposals must be submitted electronically with supporting materials as a single document at [www.cic.edu/netvue-gris](http://www.cic.edu/netvue-gris).

## Questions?

Questions about NetVUE Grants for Reframing the Institutional Saga should be addressed to Carter Aikin, NetVUE grants director, at [caikin@cic.edu](mailto:caikin@cic.edu) or (217) 854-5619.