



Program Development Grants

Invitation for Applications

Deadline: November 20, 2026



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

Program Development Grants

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 other requirements to apply for grant support to develop, expand, or otherwise strengthen existing campus programs for vocational reflection, exploration, and discernment.

The Opportunity

Colleges and universities that are members of NetVUE are already committed to campus activities that encourage vocational exploration by students. These institutions are making significant investments of their own resources to develop and sustain vocational exploration initiatives. In order to support NetVUE member campuses in their work, Lilly Endowment Inc. has provided funding to CIC to be used for NetVUE Program Development Grants. Many NetVUE campus leaders have observed that grants for program development—even at modest levels—will enable their institutions to strengthen and expand existing programs.

NetVUE Program Development Grants may be requested in amounts ranging from \$60,000 to \$100,000 for use over two years to deepen, expand, or otherwise strengthen vocation programs that are already underway (including those planned or initiated through recently completed NetVUE Professional Development Awards). Grant funds may be used for a variety of purposes, but some expenses are ineligible for grant support; for details, grant writers are expected to consult the Grant Budget Guidelines document on the NetVUE website. **Please read these guidelines carefully**, as budgets documents that fail to follow these guidelines may lead to the proposal not being entered into the review process.

A wide range of proposals that augment existing programs in vocational reflection and discernment will be considered. Examples of initiatives that might be proposed include:

- Mini-grants (with carefully crafted guidelines) to support released time for faculty members or instructional staff to design or revise courses so as to include greater engagement with vocational reflection;
- A program that brings faculty members into partnership with administrative staff (from, for example, career services, student life, or campus ministry) for vocational exploration in advising, mentoring, and/or experiential learning opportunities;
- A project to integrate reflection on calling and vocational discernment into an institution's general education requirements, or to help specific academic departments infuse this work into their major or minor field requirements; and
- Released time for one or more project leaders to coordinate grant-funded activities.

Grants will be awarded based on proposals that provide (a) a description of vocational exploration efforts to date, including the extent of institutional support for them; (b) a detailed account of proposed activities, along with a description of their purposes and goals and their relationship to the ongoing vocational exploration program of the institution; (c) a plan for assessing the proposed enhancements to existing programs, with attention to the specific goals of these efforts; and (d) the ways in which NetVUE-supported initiatives would be sustained by the institution after the grant period. Programs that include direct financial support for students in the form of internships,

scholarships, or stipends will be considered *only if these elements constitute a relatively small portion of the grant request and only if the institution provides concrete evidence as to how it will sustain the proposed programs beyond the grant period*. Statements to the effect that the institution “hopes to raise funds” to sustain the program will not be considered sufficient in such cases.

Eligibility and Funding Timeline

NetVUE member colleges and universities are eligible to apply for funding **if they have been awarded at least one previous NetVUE grant**. However, institutions are not eligible if— at the time of application—they hold a NetVUE Vocation across the Academy grant or a NetVUE Professional Development Award; in addition, any prior NetVUE Program Development Grant must have been concluded no later than June 2024. **Note:** if an institution currently holds a NetVUE grant for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith and/or for Reframing the Institutional Saga, it is eligible to apply for this grant; however, the proposal must show that staffing and other resources are adequately distributed to allow projects to succeed. Ordinarily, this will require that the projects be directed by distinct leadership teams.

This is the fourteenth round of selection for NetVUE Program Development Grants. In the first thirteen rounds, CIC awarded over 260 grants to NetVUE member institutions. The application deadline is **November 20, 2026**. Decisions will be announced in April 2027. Funds will be disbursed in two equal payments: the first half in May 2027, and the second half in May 2028 (following the approval of an interim report). Spending must be completed by April 30, 2029.

Expectations of Grant Recipients

If awarded a NetVUE Program Development Grant, the institution will agree to:

- Submit a written progress report to CIC by March 31, 2028—that is, toward the end of the first year of grant activities;
- Provide a final report (including both narrative and financial elements) to CIC by June 15, 2029, over the signature of the president or chief academic officer, which describes the outcomes of the project, indicates the degree to which project goals were met, reflects on the effectiveness of the initiatives, and charts directions for the future;
- 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 assessment efforts) in grant reports, in order to document the degree to which project goals were met and initiatives proved effective;
- Permit the inclusion of information about its project in CIC and NetVUE publications;
- Compose and disseminate several “stories of success” arising from grant-supported activities, as described elsewhere in this document, to be shared with internal and external constituencies (and provided to NetVUE as a one-page summary for posting on its website);
- 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 grant period (minimally, calendar years 2027–2029); and
- Send a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another officer at the vice-presidential level to the next national 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, **in this order and clearly labeled as such**:

- **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 listings of previously awarded grants on the website.
- **A Four- to Five-Page Narrative** that provides, *in this order and in clearly marked sections*, the following:
 - A brief description (one-half page maximum) of current vocational exploration programs on campus, as well as an account of the institution’s understanding of vocation in relation to its mission and how this understanding guides the current program and proposed project;
 - A description of both the challenges and the opportunities that the grant would address in the institution’s program for the exploration of vocation;
 - 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;
 - A detailed description of proposed activities during the grant period (this should be the largest section of the narrative);
 - A description of the institution’s strategy for encouraging broad program participation across demographic and socio-economic categories, and for building capacity to promote vocation-related work 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, and with NetVUE;
 - A description of how the institution will continue the enhanced vocation initiative after the grant period; 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. Evaluation should be carried out by individuals external to the project and, if possible, external to the institution; budgets should reflect adequate funding of these efforts.

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 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);
 - at least one co-leader of the project, who is willing and able to take over the project if the project leader becomes unable to do so;
 - 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
 - any other individuals who will help carry out the project, including a one-sentence description of each person's role.

***Note:** If the institution currently holds any other NetVUE grants, the roster should make clear how staffing responsibilities and resources are to be distributed in ways that would allow all projects to succeed.*

- A Concise Budget**, formatted in an Excel spreadsheet, accompanied by **Budget Notes**. These materials should describe the main expense categories, including programmatic 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 also 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.) Please format the budget for printing; see the guidelines above concerning font sizes and margins. **Note:** 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), 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 college staff members) to perform the project leaders' contracted duties—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 indicating the institution's commitment to the proposed project and to sustaining it—not only during the grant period, but beyond it as well (and briefly describing plans for doing so). In addition, the letter should designate a member of the president's cabinet to provide oversight for the project. If a course release or time buy-out in support of program leadership is included in this proposal and its budget, the letter of support should articulate the institution's commitment to the reallocation of relevant duties, should the grant be awarded. Finally, it should affirm the institution's plan to continue

NetVUE membership throughout the grant period and to send a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another cabinet-level officer to the next national NetVUE Conference.

Telling Stories of Success

CIC is confident that NetVUE member institutions receiving these grants will achieve meaningful and lasting outcomes, increasing support of undergraduate students—as well as members of the faculty and staff who guide them—in the complex work of vocational exploration and discernment. In order to ensure that these positive outcomes become more widely known, grant recipients are asked to craft a plan for sharing stories of success from grant-supported programming 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. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that the valuable achievements of this grant-supported effort extend beyond traditional campus silos, reaching a broader audience of current students, staff, and faculty members—as well as constituencies outside the institution.

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. We believe that, 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.

Application Deadline

The application deadline is **November 20, 2026**. Proposals should be submitted electronically with supporting materials as a single document through the application portal on the NetVUE website at www.cic.edu/netvue-pdg. Only applications submitted electronically will be considered.

Questions?

Questions about NetVUE Program Development Grants should be addressed to Carter Aikin, NetVUE grants director, at caikin@cic.edu or (217) 854-5619.