



Grants for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith

Invitation for Applications

Deadline: December 11, 2026



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

Grants for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith

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 grant support to develop or strengthen programs designed to support students exploring future leadership roles for communities of faith.

The Opportunity

NetVUE member colleges and universities recognize that intentional programming and thoughtful mentoring can prove significant for the exploration and discernment of a student's many callings in life. This grant program seeks proposals to augment current institutional approaches to undergraduate vocational development— particularly those that help students connect with faith communities. In order to support NetVUE member campuses in their work, Lilly Endowment Inc. has provided funding to CIC to be used for NetVUE Grants for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith.

NetVUE Grants for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith may be requested for up to \$60,000 for use over two years to develop new programs, or to expand existing programs, that support students as they consider vocations of leadership in gathered, worshipping faith communities. Programming should seek to develop students' capacity for such leadership, in part through facilitating formative connections between participating students and active, intentional faith communities.

A wide range of proposals for student leadership formation are welcome, but each should include a mechanism for involving students (individually or in groups) with an established faith community that gathers regularly for worship, service, and mutual care. Particular preference will be given to proposals which include efforts connected to justice or reconciliation, and to approaches that seek to ensure that all students will have access to this opportunity. Proposals may, for instance, include activities of service which promote economic justice, or make a particular effort to reach out to, include, and support students from historically marginalized backgrounds to better understand their calling, or make a concerted effort to include a variety of leading voices from within a specific faith tradition. Examples of initiatives that might be proposed include:

- A program that brings faculty members into partnership with local faith communities and their leaders (lay and ordained) to develop strategies for encouraging vocational exploration in advising, mentoring, and experiential learning opportunities;
- Paid student internships that help carry out the work of faith communities (in areas such as worship and liturgy, pastoral care, and community service), with stipends to support mentoring conversations with advisors and local faith and service leaders;
- Curriculum design and implementation for programs in religious studies, leadership, and/or the arts—including experiential learning opportunities that include a robust and in-person connection to a local faith community;
- The design of evening courses for non-degree seeking students enrolled in undergraduate programs, aimed particularly at second-career or retiring adults discerning a call to leadership in faith communities;

- Support for students to engage in off-campus study of sacred texts, in partnership with a committed cohort from within a local community of faith, with supporting academic instruction for the study of those texts; or
- Support for the exploration of bi-vocational models for faith community leadership, inviting students to reflect on building capacity for lay leadership in the context of career preparation for other fields.

Grants will be awarded based on proposals that explain (a) the purpose and goals of the proposed activities and their relationship to training for leadership in communities of faith; (b) the relationship and harmony of these activities with ongoing institutional efforts, particularly those connected to vocational exploration; (c) the ways in which proposed activities or programs would facilitate regular and formative connections between students and specific communities of faith during the grant period; and (d) the ways in which NetVUE-supported initiatives would be sustained by the institution beyond the grant period. Programs consisting primarily of direct financial support for undergraduate students (in the form of internships, scholarships, or stipends) will be considered only if the institution can demonstrate—employing concrete details and data—how it will sustain these programs well beyond the grant period.

Please note: Applications must include substantial plans for involving students with an established off-campus faith community. Proposals that do not include such plans cannot be considered.

Authors of proposals are expected to consult the **Grant Budget Guidelines** document on the NetVUE website. This important document contains details on expenses that are eligible for grant support, along with limits on certain kinds of expenses. **Please read these guidelines carefully;** budget documents that fail to follow these guidelines may lead to the proposal not being entered into the review process.

Eligibility

All NetVUE member colleges and universities that have not previously been awarded a NetVUE Grant for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith are eligible to apply for funding.

Note: If an institution already holds one or more other NetVUE grants, the application must demonstrate that staffing and other resources are adequately distributed to allow all projects to succeed. Ordinarily this will require that the programs supported by the grants be directed by distinct leadership teams. Additionally, the application should articulate how the current proposal will inform, enrich, and remain in communication with any other NetVUE grant-funded projects at the institution, as well as with the leaders of those projects.

Expectations of Grant Recipients

If awarded a NetVUE Grant for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith, the institution will agree to:

- ☐ Submit a written progress report to CIC by March 13, 2028—that is, toward the end of the first year of grant activities;
- ☐ Provide final narrative and financial reports to CIC by June 15, 2029, over the signature of the president or chief academic officer, which describe the outcomes of the project, indicate the degree to which project goals were met, reflect on the effectiveness of the initiatives, and chart directions for the future;

- ☐ 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, virtual gatherings of grant directors, and the inclusion of standard questions in campus assessment efforts of participating students;
- ☐ Permit inclusion of information about its project in CIC and NetVUE publications and social media platforms;
- ☐ 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 CIC and Lilly Endowment Inc. in all project materials and publicity;
- ☐ Maintain membership in NetVUE throughout the grant period; and
- ☐ Send a campus team headed by the president, chief academic officer, or another officer at the vice-presidential level to the 2028 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, using standard 1-inch margins and a 12-point font for legibility, and consist of the following:

- ☐ **A Title for the Proposal**
- ☐ **A One- to Two-Paragraph Executive Summary of the Proposal**
 - 400 words maximum
- ☐ **A Brief Public Description of the Project**
 - Provide a 100- to 120-word description of the proposed project for public dissemination. If funded, this text will be utilized on the NetVUE website. This paragraph should describe the proposed program in a way that is understandable by those unfamiliar with your institution and clearly articulate what the program will do (rather than why funding is needed). Avoid program names particular to your institution, opting instead for a description of their function (e.g., “a student mentoring program” rather than “The Pathways Program”). The description should make clear what the long-term impact of this project will be, particularly regarding the vocational exploration of undergraduates with regard to communities of faith.
 - Please edit this public description carefully, making sure it highlights distinctive approaches and unique elements of the proposed project. If the proposal is selected for support, this public description will become the longstanding public summary of the project’s design.
- ☐ **A Four- to Five-Page Narrative that provides, in this order and in clearly marked sections, the following:**
 - A description 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 current and proposed programming;

- A description of both the **challenges and the opportunities** that the grant would address, specifically related to the institution's program for vocational exploration among potential future leaders for communities of faith;
 - 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 description of **the program design and key activities** during the grant period (This should be the most substantial section of the application narrative);
 - A description of the institution's **strategy for encouraging broad participation** across socio-economic categories, either for exploring a wide range of voices within partnering faith communities, or for building institutional capacity to promote vocation-related work among those who might not otherwise have participated as widely in the programming, or both;
 - 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 sustain the enhanced vocation initiative** after the grant period; and
 - A **plan for assessment and evaluation** of the project, both during and at the end of the grant period, along with a description of indicators that would demonstrate that project goals have been met. The assessment plan (and associated budget) should include an external evaluation of all program elements. The assessment plan should also indicate a willingness to administer a standard survey to participating students and report on aggregated results (for more information, see NetVUE grants assessment resource on the [main grants page](#)).
- ☐ **A One-Page Project Timeline**
- ☐ **A One-Page Roster**
- A list of names and contact information (including phone number and email address) for
 - the principal project contact;
 - the senior (cabinet-level) administrator who will oversee the project;
 - at least one leader from a local community of faith who is willing to be engaged in the project and to provide a letter of support;
 - the project's other leaders, whether from within the institution or outside it; and
 - if this person has not already been listed, the NetVUE Campus Contact at the institution.
 - A short description of qualifications for the specified roles.
- ☐ **A Letter of Support from a Leader of the Partnering Faith Community**
- Describe the strengths and challenges faced by the leader's community of faith, as well as their community's capacity to provide effective mentoring and support to students considering vocations of leadership.
- ☐ **A Concise Budget**
- Format in Microsoft Excel

- Describe the main expense categories for each project year, including all programmatic expenses and, as needed, staff and faculty member stipends, honoraria for speakers, meals and travel for meetings, and costs of materials and supplies.
- Include a separate column indicating the institution's financial support of this project.
- *Details about eligible expenses and the construction of the budget, as well as answers to frequently asked budget questions and a sample budget, are available in the Grant Budget Guidelines document on the NetVUE website.*

Please Note: Budgets must include support for robust assessment efforts (led by someone outside the leadership roster and the partnering community—and, if possible, outside the institution), yielding a written report that tracks and explains progress on specific expected outcomes (particularly those connected with student formation). 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 Endorsement from the President**, covering the following items:

- An indication of the institution's commitment to sustain grant-supported activities during and after the grant period;
- A designation of a member of the president's cabinet to provide oversight for the project;
- An affirmation of 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 2028 NetVUE Conference; and
- If the application includes a substantial funding request in support of student internships, scholarships, or stipends, the commitment by the institution to support these programs at the same level after the conclusion of the grant agreement should also be addressed in the presidential letter of endorsement, with some indication of concrete plans for doing so.

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 and Funding Timeline

The application deadline is **December 11, 2026**. Proposals should be submitted electronically with supporting materials as a single document, using the application portal in the NetVUE section of the CIC website. Only applications submitted electronically will be considered.

Decisions will be announced in April 2027. Funds will be disbursed in two equal payments: the first half in April 2027, and the second half in April 2028 (following approval of an interim report). Spending must be completed by April 30, 2029.

Questions?

Questions about this and other NetVUE grant programs should be addressed to Carter Aikin, NetVUE grants director, at caikin@cic.edu or (217) 854-5619.