

CIC NetVUE
Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education

Professional Development Awards

Invitation for Applications

One-year awards of up to $25,000
Deadline: April 2, 2027

Council of Independent Colleges

LILLY ENDOWMENT INC

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), institutions may apply for additional funding to explore the role of artificial intelligence in 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 their diverse undergraduate student populations. 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. **Please read these guidelines carefully,** as budget documents that fail to follow these guidelines may lead to the proposal not being entered into the review process.

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 of various backgrounds and identities 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 of various backgrounds and identities as they consider their future directions in life.

In the first thirteen rounds of Professional Development Awards, CIC awarded 333 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 of educators as they support undergraduates through the lens of vocation.

Special Initiative: Understanding the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Vocation

CIC will offer the NetVUE Professional Development Award at a higher level of funding for projects that build institutional capacity for engaging with the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence in vocational reflection. While concerns connected to artificial intelligence may arise organically as a part of many campus programs connected to vocation, some member institutions may wish to focus more intentionally on these concerns as a dimension of professional development. Proposals submitted under this initiative have the same eligibility rules as the general award, but funding may be requested up to $25,000.

The emergence and ongoing development of artificial intelligence raises practical and existential questions about the vocation of teaching and learning, along with how artificial intelligence can assist (or prove a barrier that inhibits) individual growth in understanding vocation and living vocationally. This special initiative will support member campuses seeking the time and discernment spaces necessary to address these urgent concerns, while also encouraging them to seek broad participation and wide-ranging outcomes (including support of all students by staff and faculty members) in grant-funded activities.

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 how vocation language, practices, and resources should interact with the challenges and opportunities posed by artificial intelligence. **Please note:** *projects that focus only on artificial intelligence and its role in undergraduate education, while neglecting the central inquiry into vocational reflection and vocation-related programming, are not eligible for funding.*

Eligibility and Funding Timeline

All NetVUE member colleges and universities are eligible to apply for funding, provided that, at the time of application—they hold (or have already been awarded and are about to hold) a NetVUE Professional Development Award, Program Development Grant, or Campuswide Innovation in Vocation Award. If the member has previously held a NetVUE Professional Development Award, that grant must have been concluded no later than December 31, 2024.

The application deadline for this round is **April 2, 2027**. Decisions will be announced in June 2027, with funds disbursed in July for use between July 15, 2027, and June 30, 2028. Spending must be completed by June 30, 2028.

Eligible institutions that hold (or are preparing to hold) a grant from the Educating Character Initiative must provide a statement explaining how that project and the proposed NetVUE Professional Development Award will complement and align with one another. The proposal must also show how staffing, leadership, and other needs will be apportioned to allow both projects to reach their respective goals successfully, if both projects are awarded.

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, 2028, 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;
- ▢ Maintain membership in NetVUE through at least the 2028 calendar year; and
- ▢ Send a campus team headed by the president or an officer at the vice-presidential level to the 2028 NetVUE Conference. (Three-person teams pay only a nominal registration fee; costs for accommodation and meals are waived.)

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 Public Description of 100 to 120 words** 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 it should clearly articulate what the program will do (rather than why funding is needed). Descriptions should use third-person, objective language (rather than describing what "we" will do), but avoid program names particular to the 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.

☐ **A Detailed Narrative** that provides, in clearly marked sections and in this order:

- A description of professional development needs and their connection to the institution's vocational exploration efforts;
- A statement of the project's 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;
- In the longest section of the application, 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) any current vocation-related work on campus that prepares the grant team for a more focused inquiry into the role of artificial intelligence in vocational reflection; (b) any AI-related policies, institutional philosophies, or initiatives currently underway on campus that will influence grant activities; (c) the vocation-related questions or concerns the grant team aims to address during the grant period; and (d) how the grant will prioritize broad participation (of faculty members, staff, and students) throughout the grant period;
- 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** that lists the names and contact information for (a) the principal project contact (the person leading grant-funded activities, not the institution's grants administrator); (b) the senior (cabinet-level) administrator who will oversee the project; and (c) 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 (or have been awarded and are about to 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 2, 2027**. 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 special initiative on Artificial Intelligence) should be addressed to Robert Pampel, NetVUE director of member engagement, at *rpampel@cic.edu.*