



Educating Character Initiative 2026: Collaboration and Community Across U.S. Higher Education

The [Educating Character Initiative](#) at Wake Forest University is excited to launch its renewed Invitation to Community and 2026 Request for Proposals.

The Educating Character Initiative was founded in 2023 as a project of the Program for Leadership and Character through the generous support of Lilly Endowment Inc. Since our launch, we have welcomed over 1,600 faculty, staff, and administrators from more than 600 institutions and organizations to join a community with a common purpose: educating character and building communities of character in higher education and beyond. Over two previous grant cycles, ECI has awarded \$35 million dollars in grants to 146 institutions engaged in efforts to strengthen the understanding, integration, and education of character at U.S. colleges and universities.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Educating Character Initiative aims to equip a wide range of public and private institutions of higher education—including, but not limited to, major research universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, military academies, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, religiously affiliated colleges, and colleges that serve under-resourced students—with the resources, funding, and support to integrate character education into their distinctive institutional contexts, curricula, and cultures. Additionally, our initiative provides support for practitioners and researchers across a variety of roles and sectors within higher education to collaborate and build communities of character. The broader aspiration is to work with individuals and institutions to foster a robust community that recognizes the value of educating character within higher education.

In addition to organizing workshops, conferences, and convenings and developing resources for faculty and staff, the Educating Character Initiative awards grants to institutions. In 2026,

funding for institutions will include **Institutional Impact Grants** of between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000 and **Capacity-Building Grants** of up to \$50,000. Successful grantees will be teams of faculty, staff, and administrators at U.S. colleges and universities with outstanding proposals for developing the moral, civic, and/or intellectual character of faculty, staff, and students.

II. A COMMUNITY OF CHARACTER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Time of Renewal for Character Education

Historically, many U.S. colleges and universities included the formation of character as a central educational aim.¹ Though emphasis on such aims diminished in the latter half of the twentieth century, a broad range of institutions of higher education are now seeking to recover a focus on character while honoring the pluralism that characterizes American life.

Across institutional roles, responsibilities, and disciplines, college and university leaders are adopting a renewed focus on the importance of character education, both for forming students to use their knowledge, skills, and capacities to serve humanity and for highlighting the distinctive value of higher education in contemporary life. Current faculty overwhelmingly see character formation as part of their role. In a faculty survey administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 85% of 20,000 faculty across 143 four-year institutions said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that it is important for faculty to “develop students’ moral character” and “help students develop personal values.”² Across several fields, scholars are advancing more sophisticated and practically relevant accounts of character, and experts have argued that educating good character can be a valuable purpose for institutions of higher education. In particular, intentional efforts to educate character can support student wellbeing and flourishing, sustain academic excellence and integrity, promote belonging and meaningful community, foster good leadership and citizenship, advance career preparation and vocational discernment, and encourage the responsible use of technology. In many cases, educating

¹ See, e.g., Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Douglas Sloan, “The Teaching of Ethics in the American Undergraduate Curriculum, 1876–1976,” in *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, ed. Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 1–57; and Elizabeth Kiss and J. Peter Euben, eds., *Debating Moral Education: Rethinking the Role of the Modern University* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

² E. B. Stolzenberg, M. K. Eagan, H. B. Zimmerman, J. Berdan Lozano, N. M. Cesar-Davis, M. C. Aragon, and C. Rios-Aguilar, *Undergraduate Teaching Faculty: The HERI Faculty Survey 2016-2017* (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2019), 33.

character can also support an institution's efforts to fulfill its distinctive educational mission, values, and aspirations.³

At the same time, character education is not without its challenges. While many colleges and universities desire to integrate character into their cultures and curricula, many do not know *how* to do so effectively. This work is especially complex given the diversity and pluralism of American society; the increasing demands placed on universities by students, parents, employers, and the general public; and the lack of a common vocabulary and institutional structure that can overcome silos of specialization characteristic of many disciplines and institutions.⁴ Faculty trained to do research in specialized disciplines often do not know how to educate character effectively in the classroom, and the pressure to publish research and fulfill increasing service demands makes it difficult to devote time and energy to learning a new field or designing new courses that address questions of character. Administrators trying to cut costs and satisfy a diverse range of stakeholders often lack the funding, time, and capacity to focus on educating character across their institutions.⁵ These challenges, among others, make it difficult for many institutions to imagine, much less implement, meaningful efforts to educate character in their contexts. This is a time when support for cultivating character is both highly desired and desperately needed.

Since 2017, the Program for Leadership and Character has been advancing a mission to educate character at Wake Forest University. Inspired by our Wake Forest motto, *Pro Humanitate* (for humanity) and supported through a generous grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., we have developed the Educating Character Initiative to support a wider community of individuals and institutions committed to educating character within colleges and universities. Through the creation of a community of interested institutions and educators, the development and dissemination of research and resources, the organization of conferences and convenings, and the direct awarding of grants to institutions interested in advancing this work in their own contexts, we aspire to nurture a creative, compassionate, and collaborative community of educators who can learn from each other as partners in character education.

³ These reasons were addressed in Michael Lamb, "Why Character?", Educating Character Across the University Conference, Wake Forest University (December 2, 2022).

⁴ On institutional barriers to educating character in colleges and universities, see Michael Lamb, Edward Brooks, and Jonathan Brant, "Character Education in the University: Opportunities and Challenges," in *Cultivating Virtue in the University*, ed. Jonathan Brant, Edward Brooks, and Michael Lamb (Oxford University Press, 2022), 253–277, esp. 258–263.

⁵ Ibid.

An Invitation to Community

At the opening of our third year of the Educating Character Initiative, we are filled with gratitude for the exceptional creativity, effort, humility, and friendship visible in this emerging community of character. We are looking forward to embracing another year of opportunity to build capacity and community around character education.

We hope you will consider joining the growing Educating Character Initiative community of faculty, staff, administrators, and higher education leaders from over 600 institutions and organizations. By creating and sustaining a broad-based community of individuals and institutions that serve faculty, staff, and students, we seek to encourage a range of perspectives on character in higher education and support opportunities to learn from each other, experiment with new ideas and pedagogies, and benefit from the individual and collective wisdom of our community. We invite participation from individuals and teams from all two- and four-year colleges and universities—both public and private, secular and religious.

Whether you are just beginning to explore an interest in educating character or have been teaching, researching, or educating character for years, we invite you to join us in one or more of the following ways:

- [Register as a member of the Educating Character Initiative Community](#). We are an international and collaborative community where we learn from and with each other. We hope you will join not only for what you might gain but also for what you might offer. Registration is free and will give you access to information about events, opportunities for conversation and learning, and resources for educating character.
- Participate in [workshops, webinars, and convenings](#) hosted by the Educating Character Initiative, such as our faculty workshop on how to integrate character into courses; our monthly webinar focused upon equipping faculty, staff, and administrators to educate character and design character-infused curricular and co-curricular programming; our ECI Book Club that meets regularly to discuss character-related books; and more.
- Contribute to resources or research on educating character.
- Apply for funding to support character-building efforts through our grants (see the Request for Proposals below).

In addition to these opportunities, grant recipients and community members will be supported by the Educating Character Initiative team and each other as we seek to understand, implement, and expand character education and support a wider community of individuals and institutions focused on educating character in their distinctive contexts.

Character in Context

What do we mean by “character”?

Character education is not one-size-fits-all. While character education includes a set of widely shared virtues, strategies, and objectives and offers vital resources, frameworks, and examples to support faculty and staff in this work, it must be adapted to an institution’s distinctive history, culture, and context and integrated in organic ways that align with an institution’s core mission. Given the relational, institutional, and intercultural dynamics involved, the process of discerning and achieving such alignment is more time-consuming than a simple “plug-and-play” approach, but it also promises more potential for success and sustainability.

The Educating Character Initiative welcomes a range of approaches to moral, civic, and/or intellectual character and encourages engagement promoting character development that aligns with the mission and vision of each institution as well as each institution’s unique population of faculty, staff, and students.

An Approach from Wake Forest’s Program for Leadership and Character

The Educating Character Initiative is a part of the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University, whose mission and vision of character serve as our institutional anchor.

The mission of the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest is to inspire, educate, and empower leaders of character to serve humanity. Through innovative teaching, creative programming, and cutting-edge research, we aim to transform the lives of students, foster a collaborative culture of leadership and character, and catalyze a broader public conversation that places character at the center of leadership.

The Program for Leadership and Character understands character generally as “the collection of stable, deep, and enduring dispositions that define who we are and shape how we characteristically think, feel, and act.”⁶ The aim of the Program is to help students develop good dispositions (“virtues”) that foster individual and communal flourishing and to avoid bad dispositions (“vices”) that inhibit flourishing. The Program for Leadership and Character at

⁶ See Michael Lamb, Jonathan Brant, and Edward Brooks, “Seven Strategies for Cultivating Virtue in the University” in *Cultivating Virtue in the University*, ed. Jonathan Brant, Edward Brooks, and Michael Lamb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 115–156.

Wake Forest focuses in particular on nurturing students' sense of purpose and virtues of compassion, courage, gratitude, honesty, hope, humility, integrity, justice, kindness, resilience, temperance, and wisdom, among others. Different faculty, departments, and schools prioritize some virtues more than others and occasionally foster other virtues such as curiosity, creativity, and open-mindedness.

Overall, the Program for Leadership and Character's approach to educating character is:

- *Community-focused* in recognizing that individual character is never developed in isolation but is informed by and directed toward particular civic, cultural, educational, religious, and social communities
- *Developmental* in recognizing that character is always in the process of being developed and can be intentionally cultivated
- *Contextually and culturally sensitive* in emphasizing that how character is developed and exercised depends on one's institutional context, background, and situation and that people with different identities, positionalities, and circumstances may enact character in different ways
- *Inclusive and pluralistic* in welcoming diverse voices, traditions, and perspectives and helping students clarify their own values and commitments in the context of such engagement
- *Interdisciplinary* in engaging diverse disciplinary and professional fields.⁷

To support the development of good character, the Program utilizes a framework anchored in seven evidence-based strategies for character development:

- Habituation through practice
- Reflection on personal experience
- Engagement with virtuous exemplars
- Dialogue that increases virtue literacy
- Awareness of situational variables and biases
- Moral reminders
- Friendships of mutual accountability.⁸

These strategies and others are embedded throughout the Program's curricular and

⁷ Michael Lamb and Kenneth Townsend, "Wake Forest University's Program for Leadership and Character: A Case Study," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Character Development*, Volume II, ed. Michael D. Matthews and Richard M. Lerner (Routledge, 2024), 369–389.

⁸ Lamb, Brant, and Brooks, "Seven Strategies for Cultivating Virtue in the University."

co-curricular programming to support students' holistic character development. To learn more about the Program for Leadership and Character, including more information about the seven strategies, please visit our website: <https://leadershipandcharacter.wfu.edu/>.

We offer the above example of how the Program for Leadership and Character understands character education as an illustration of an approach to educating character. While other institutions are welcome to adapt what is useful from this approach, we do not expect that other institutions have or will adopt a similar framework or orientation.

There are many approaches to character and character education on offer, including from other members of the Educating Character Initiative Community. In 2025-26, we plan to collect and disseminate resources from our partners to expand the range and variety of resources that can be adapted by practitioners and scholars of character for their own institutional contexts. We encourage you to use the approach that works best for you and your institution.

III. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE 2026 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

In 2026, the Educating Character Initiative intends to award grants to institutions, varying in scale, focus, and expected impact. We anticipate awarding **Institutional Impact Grants** of between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000, as well as **Capacity-Building Grants** of up to \$50,000. Successful grantees will be teams of faculty, staff, and administrators at U.S. colleges and universities with outstanding proposals for developing the moral, civic, and/or intellectual character and capacity of faculty, staff, and students.

These grants are meant to provide institutions with the time, resources, and freedom to discern what might work best in their context. Priority will be given to applications that show strong institutional support; clear alignment with the institution's mission, vision, and values; the potential for integrating character in ways that are robust and impactful across the institution; a commitment to preparing students to engage the world beyond their institution; and a willingness to contribute to the community of character through shared wisdom and resources. The Educating Character Initiative is prepared to offer context-specific support from Wake Forest staff, fellows, and consultants to aid institutions as needed and desired.

Details about the two types of grants are below.

1. Institutional Impact Grants

We will award Institutional Impact Grants of between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000 to institutions who wish to undertake a substantial and sustained effort to educate character in undergraduate populations at their institution or through multi-institutional collaborations. Organizations should align the size of the request with the impact of the proposed project and with their expertise and capacity to steward the funds efficiently and effectively. Since funds are limited, please design projects that will have the maximum impact using the fewest resources.

These three-year grants will provide support to enable institutional leaders, faculty, and staff to infuse character in undergraduate curricula and programming in ways that align organically with their college or university mission, context, and culture. Institutional Impact Grants may be especially useful for institutions that have already begun educating character in their context, that have previously received a Capacity-Building Grant from the ECI, and/or that have faculty and staff with the relevant expertise to undertake a major initiative dedicated to character. We imagine these grants will be focused primarily on coherent and collaborative implementation rather than initial exploration and development of a character framework, though we welcome innovative ideas that have not been fully tested.

We welcome applications from two- and four-year U. S. colleges and universities. We also welcome applications from cross-institutional networks of colleges, universities, and organizations that wish to collaborate on a shared project or initiative. In the case of cross-institutional networks, grants must be based at one college or university, though funds may be disbursed to multiple institutions or organizations.

Potential project activities could include, but are not limited to, some or all of the following:

- The launch of a new major, minor, certificate program, or curricular requirement and/or a co-curricular center, institute, or program related to character.
- New faculty, staff, or postdoctoral fellows whose time is committed to character education efforts.
- Course or time buyouts, salary replacement, and/or summer salary for faculty or staff to devote time to develop a program, initiative, or course at their institution.
- Credit-bearing courses and/or co-curricular programming such as speaker events, discussion groups, retreats, and/or workshops for students, faculty, and/or staff.
- Efforts to build alignment at the institution around an approach to character, including faculty/staff seminars bringing together key partners across the institution to discuss the opportunities and challenges of character education.

- Honoraria for visiting scholars, educators, or experts to generate interest in character education, lead a faculty workshop on character and related pedagogical strategies, and/or provide insight on how character might be integrated at their institution. (Note: Individual workshops and consulting may be requested for free from the staff and fellows of the Educating Character Initiative.)
- Books and materials for faculty/staff seminars, reading groups, and research on character education.
- Student assistants to contribute to literature reviews, data collection, or other tasks.
- Survey administration and participant incentives to collect data from students, faculty, and staff related to the impact or viability of projects or initiatives.
- Professional development support, such as travel and registration for relevant workshops that focus on character or character education or funds to host “train the trainer” events at the institution. (Note: The ECI team may be able to provide some staff support for faculty or staff development workshops at your institution, but travel costs for ECI staff attendance should be incorporated into your proposal.)
- Development or revision of resources for educating character at the institution, and/or funds to make resources for educating character ready to share with the wider ECI community.

Lists of institutions and projects funded by ECI Institutional Impact Grants are available for [2024](#) and [2025](#).

Application Instructions

The application for Institutional Impact Grants will be a two-step process.

Step 1: Letter of Inquiry

All accredited U.S. colleges and universities that are interested in educating character in undergraduates are invited to submit an initial application through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). You must provide:

- Contact information for principal investigator(s) and administrative assistant(s)
- Contact information for financial officer responsible for this grant
- Contact information for authorized signatory for this grant
- Project title and abstract (100-word maximum)
- Amount requested (between \$100,000 and \$1M)
- The anticipated number of students impacted by the proposed project

- The anticipated number of faculty and staff impacted by the proposed project
- The anticipated number of people outside the university impacted by the proposed project
- Proposal Narrative addressing the following (10-page maximum):
 - A brief overview of the institutional context that provides a frame for the proposed efforts in character education, including a sense of how the overall mission, vision, culture, orientation, or tradition at the institution supports the understanding and integration of character.
 - A description of work already undertaken at the institution toward the education of character in undergraduate students and any relevant outcomes.
 - A description of the character approach that applicants intend to use for the project, noting the applicants' relevant expertise and/or experience with this approach.
 - A description of the core goals of the project.
 - A description of the project activities, articulating the connection between those activities and the project goals.
 - A general timeline for activities (a more detailed timeline will be requested at the full proposal stage). Grant activities may not extend beyond three years beginning Summer 2026.
 - A description of the target impact, outcomes, and outputs for the project. Identify who will be impacted, how the impact will be achieved, and the place of intentional character formation in achieving this impact. Articulate proposed outcomes, including plans for assessment and measurement of those outcomes. Name intended outputs, such as publications, resources, or other anticipated products of the work.
 - A plan for sustaining this work beyond the initial grant period.
- Brief curriculum vitae for the project leader(s), no more than 5 pages each. No photos, please.
- Budget, including (minimally) separate lines for faculty engagement and curriculum development, student programming, research and assessment, personnel, and other character-related training costs. Due to limited funding, general overhead or indirect costs may not be included in the request; however, direct costs for administration, equipment, and consumable items may be included. Applicants are encouraged to determine how best to use grant funds and to show institutional support through cost-sharing and donor-matching where appropriate.
- A signed letter of support from the head of the institution, such as the president, chancellor, or vice-chancellor
- A statement regarding the health and stability of the institution's finances and its commitment to the organizational infrastructure crucial to support the project

- throughout its term
- Optional Appendices:
 - Statements of support from other institutional leaders, such as a provost, dean, or department chair, or evidence of strong and broad faculty/staff partnerships.
 - Additional artifacts that support the narrative of the initial application, such as course syllabi; program descriptions; published or on-going research; descriptions of character-focused conferences, workshops, or convenings; or examples of other character-focused grants and awards. Additional artifacts should be organized in a Google drive accessible to the Educating Character Initiative via a link in the project narrative.

Given limited funds, Institutional Impact Grant applicants should be mindful of the following when determining the size of the grant request:

- The proposed project's depth of impact
- The unit(s) impacted by the proposed project (departments, divisions, schools, colleges, or university-wide)
- Whether the project involves collaboration across institutions
- The expected development of educational resources that can be adopted or adapted by other educators or institutions
- The expected development of scholarly research that can inform the larger community
- The extent to which existing expertise, programs, and operational frameworks at the institution can scaffold a project of the requested size.

The Program for Leadership and Character will provide opportunities for colleges and universities to convene in person and virtually to discuss topics of common interest. Since the Educating Character Initiative will be organizing major conferences and convenings for the entire network, funding to host conferences may not be included in these requests, unless plans are coordinated in advance with the staff of the Educating Character Initiative. Staff from the Educating Character Initiative will also be available to provide individualized coaching and support for faculty, staff, and student development and/or assessment at no cost.

Initial applications (Letters of Inquiry) are due by **February 20, 2026, at 5:00 pm ET** through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). The portal will accept completed applications beginning **January 12, 2026**. Responses to the initial application are expected to be shared with applicants by **March 27, 2026**. All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit the [ECI Grants](#) page.

The Educating Character Initiative team will host two one-hour online sessions in order to

provide a general overview of available grants on **October 28 and November 13, 2025, 12-1:00 pm ET**. We will host an overview of Institutional Impact Grants specifically on **December 12 from 12:00-1:00 pm E.T.**

[Register for online sessions here](#). All inquiries should be directed toward ECI@wfu.edu.

Step 2: Full Proposal

A subset of institutions who submitted Letters of Inquiry (LOIs) will be invited to submit a **full proposal by June 1, 2026, at 5:00 pm ET**. Project teams invited to submit full proposals can expect to be asked to produce revisions to the LOI narrative, timeline, or budget, more detailed versions of requirements listed in the LOI, a theory of change, and supplementary materials as requested by ECI. In some cases, teams will be invited to submit a full proposal for a level of funding reduced from the initial request.

We anticipate the announcement of grant decisions by **July 1, 2026**, with the term of the grant expected to begin on **August 1, 2026**. All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit [ECI Grants](#).

Grant Eligibility and Expectations for Funded Proposals

The project leader(s) must be in or contracted to a long-term faculty or staff position at an accredited college or university in the United States. All contributors to applicant teams agree to [register as members of the Educating Character Initiative Community](#).

Colleges and universities should coordinate projects internally and plan to apply for no more than one Institutional Impact Grant. In most cases, institutions may apply for an Institutional Impact or Capacity-Building Grant, but not both. Institutions that currently hold an Institutional Impact Grant from the ECI should consult with ECI before applying for any additional funding opportunities. Funds may not be used for capital projects. Please reach out to the ECI team with any questions.

Funded projects and project leaders will commit to the following:

- Attend check-in meetings with ECI staff; submit interim and final reports, including assessments of outcomes on students, faculty, and/or staff; and interim and final expenditure reports.
- Attend at least one gathering sponsored by the Program for Leadership and Character.
- Attend and present key results at a convening where they will be required to:
 - provide feedback to others and receive feedback on their own project

- suggest avenues for future research, integration, and/or implementation
- share the results and findings of their projects.
- Consent to have their presentation(s) recorded.
- For all project outputs that arise from work supported by the grant, awardees must notify the Educating Character Initiative of any significant events, presentations, or awards; submit copies of all published work or other public products to the Educating Character Initiative; and acknowledge the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University and Lilly Endowment Inc. in project publications.
- Follow stipulations of the grant award as communicated and determined by the Educating Character Initiative.

2. Capacity-Building Grants

Among the persistent challenges for faculty, staff, and administrators seeking to cultivate character at their institutions is a lack of resources, including difficulty integrating character across their curriculum or culture without more institutional and financial support. To address this challenge, ECI will award **Capacity-Building Grants of up to \$50,000** to institutions who wish to strengthen their ability to educate and embed character in their distinctive contexts. These grants may be especially useful for institutions that are just beginning to explore how to educate character or envisioning discrete projects that do not require substantial funding. Some teams may wish to use funding from this grant to develop a larger grant application to a funding initiative in a future year.

We welcome applications from two- and four-year colleges and universities. We also welcome applications from cross-institutional networks of colleges, universities, and organizations that wish to collaborate on a shared project or initiative. In the case of cross-institutional networks, grants must be based at one college or university, though funds may be disbursed to multiple institutions or organizations.

Potential project activities could include, but are not limited to, some or all of the following:

- Course or time buyouts, salary replacement, and/or summer funding for individual faculty or staff to devote time to planning or implementing a program, initiative, or course at their institution.
- Credit-bearing courses and/or co-curricular programming such as speaker events, discussion groups, retreats, and/or workshops for students, faculty, and/or staff.
- Efforts to build alignment at the institution around an approach to character, including faculty/staff seminars bringing together key partners across the institution to discuss

the opportunities and challenges of character education.

- Honoraria for visiting scholars, educators, or experts to generate interest in character education, lead a faculty workshop on character and related pedagogical strategies, and/or provide insight on how character might be integrated at their institution. (Note: Individual workshops and consulting may be requested for free from the staff and fellows of the Educating Character Initiative.)
- Books and materials for faculty/staff seminars, reading groups, and research on character education.
- Student assistants to contribute to literature reviews, data collection, or other tasks.
- Survey administration and participant incentives to collect data from students, faculty, and staff related to the impact or viability of projects or initiatives.
- Professional development support, such as travel and registration for relevant workshops that focus on character or character education or “train the trainer” events at the institution. (Note: The ECI team may be able to provide some staff support for faculty development workshops at your institution, but travel costs for ECI staff attendance should be incorporated into your proposal.)
- Development or revision of resources for educating character at the institution, and/or funds to make resources for educating character ready to share with the wider ECI community.
- Funding and time to plan and apply for a larger grant from another funding initiative.

Because we are eager to support diverse approaches to character education and learn from thoughtful experimentations, we encourage project leaders to be intentional and creative in building the necessary support and capacity to educate character across their institutions. Given limited funding, we also encourage project leaders to be frugal with resources and intentional about which funds are most necessary to achieve the project's aims.

A list of institutions and projects funded by Capacity-Building Grants is available for [2024](#) and [2025](#).

Application Instructions

Interested applicants for the Capacity-Building Grants should apply through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). You must provide:

- Contact information for principal investigator(s) and administrative assistant(s)
- Contact information for financial officer responsible for this grant
- Contact information for authorized signatory for this grant

- Project title and abstract (100-word maximum)
- Amount requested (\$50,000 maximum)
- The anticipated number of students impacted by the proposed project
- The anticipated number of faculty and staff impacted by the proposed project
- The anticipated number of people outside the university impacted by the proposed project
- Proposal narrative addressing the following (10-page maximum):
 - A brief overview of the institutional context that provides a frame for the proposed efforts in character education, including a sense of how the overall mission, vision, culture, orientation, or tradition at the institution supports the understanding and integration of character.
 - A description of work already undertaken at the institution toward the education of character in undergraduate students and any relevant outcomes.
 - A description of the approach to educating character that applicants intend to use for the project, noting the relevant expertise and/or experience of the applicants. If the project aims to determine the most appropriate character frameworks, orientations, or approaches for the institution, please explain how this discernment will proceed.
 - A description of the core capacity-building and character goals of the project.
 - A description of project activities and explanation of why ECI support is necessary to complete these activities.
 - A description of the target impact, outcomes, and outputs for the project. Identify who will be impacted, how the impact will be achieved, and the role of intentional character formation in achieving this impact. Articulate proposed capacity-building and character outcomes, including plans for assessment and measurement of those outcomes. Name intended outputs, such as publications, resources, or other anticipated products of the work.
 - A timeline of activities, to extend not more than one year beginning Summer 2026.
 - A plan for sustaining this work beyond the initial grant period.
 - A statement regarding the health and stability of the institution's finances and its commitment to the organizational infrastructure crucial to support the project throughout its term.
- Brief curriculum vitae for the project leader(s), no more than 5 pages each. No photos, please.
- Signed letter of support from the head of the institution, such as the president, chancellor, or vice-chancellor.
- Budget, including (minimally) separate lines for faculty engagement and curriculum development, student programming, research and assessment, personnel, and other character-related training costs, separated by semester of the award period. Due to

limited funding, general overhead or indirect costs may not be included in the request; however, direct costs for administration, equipment, and consumable items may be included. Applicants are encouraged to determine how best to use grant funds and to show institutional support through cost-sharing and donor-matching where appropriate.

- Optional appendices:
 - Statements of support from other institutional leaders, such as a provost, dean, or department chair, or evidence of strong and broad faculty/staff partnerships.
 - Additional artifacts that support the narrative, such as course syllabi; program descriptions; published or on-going research; a description of character-focused conferences, workshops, or convenings; or descriptions of grants and awards focused on character formation. Additional artifacts should be organized in a Google drive accessible to the Educating Character Initiative via a link in the project narrative.

The Program for Leadership and Character will provide multiple opportunities for colleges and universities to convene in person and virtually to discuss topics of common interest. Since the Educating Character Initiative will be organizing major conferences and convenings for the entire network, funding to host conferences may not be included in these requests, unless plans are coordinated in advance with the staff of the Educating Character Initiative. Staff from the Educating Character Initiative will also be available to provide individualized coaching and support for faculty, staff, and student development and/or assessment, so those costs need not be included within the grant.

The submission deadline for the application is **March 20, 2026, at 5:00 pm ET** through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). The portal will accept completed applications beginning **February 27, 2026**. We anticipate the announcement of award decisions by **May 11, 2026** for projects to begin no earlier than **July 1, 2026**. All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit [ECI Grants](#).

The Educating Character Initiative team will host two hour-long online sessions in order to provide a general overview of all available grants on **October 28 and November 13, 2025, 12:00-1:00 pm ET**. We will host one one-hour online session in order to provide an overview of Capacity-Building Grants on **January 8, 2026, 12:00-1:00 pm ET**.

[Register for an online session here](#). All inquiries should be directed toward ECI@wfu.edu.

Grant Eligibility and Expectations for Funded Proposals

The project leader(s) must be in or contracted to a long-term faculty or staff position at an accredited college or university in the United States. All contributors to applicant teams agree to [register as members of the Educating Character Initiative Community](#).

Colleges and universities should coordinate projects internally and plan to apply for no more than one institutional grant. In most cases, institutions may apply for a Capacity-Building or Institutional Impact Grant, but not both. Institutions that currently hold an Institutional Impact Grant or Capacity-Building Grant from the ECI should consult with ECI before applying for any additional funding. Funds may not be used for capital projects. Please reach out to the ECI team with any questions.

Funded projects and project leaders will commit to the following:

- Attend check-in meetings with ECI staff, submit final reports, including assessments of outcomes on students, faculty, and/or staff, as well as final expenditure reports.
- Attend at least one gathering sponsored by the Program for Leadership and Character.
- Attend and present key results at a convening where they will be required to:
 - provide feedback to others and receive feedback on their own project
 - suggest avenues for future research, integration, and/or implementation
 - share the results and findings of their projects.
- Consent to have their presentation(s) recorded.
- For all project outputs that arise from work supported by the grant, awardees must notify the Educating Character Initiative of any significant events, presentations, or awards; submit copies of all published work or other public products to the Educating Character Initiative; and acknowledge the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University and Lilly Endowment Inc. in project publications.
- Follow stipulations of the grant award as communicated and determined by the Educating Character Initiative.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest is delighted to have the opportunity to expand its impact through the Educating Character Initiative. We are grateful to Lilly Endowment Inc. for its commitment to this vision and to current members of the ECI Community, who are contributing their insight, expertise, and effort to this initiative. We look forward to expanding the community of character educators within higher education through this Invitation to Community and Request for Proposals. Over the next year and beyond, the

ECI aspires to empower generative partnerships with and among individuals and institutions—partnerships of mutual learning organized around creative and thoughtful new projects in character education. We hope you will join us.

APPENDIX: DATES TO REMEMBER

Information Sessions	• General Grants Info Session I: October 28, 12-1 pm ET • General Grants Info Session II: November 13, 12-1 pm ET • Institutional Impact Grants Info Session: December 12, 12-1 pm ET • Capacity-Building Grants Info Session: January 8, 12-1 pm ET Register for a session here.
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Deadlines	Institutional Impact Grants	Capacity-Building Grants
Letter of Inquiry Due	February 20, 2026	n/a
Final Proposal Due	June 1, 2026	March 20, 2026
Grant Decisions	July 1, 2026	May 11, 2026
Grant Start Date	August 1, 2026	July 1, 2026

All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit [ECI Grants](#).