



## Educating Character Initiative 2025: Building Capacity and Community at U.S. Colleges and Universities

The [Educating Character Initiative](#), a project of the [Program for Leadership and Character](#) at Wake Forest University, is excited to launch its second Invitation to Community and 2025 Request for Proposals.

The Educating Character Initiative was founded in 2023 through the generous support of Lilly Endowment Inc. In our first year, we were delighted to see enthusiastic interest from educators across the U.S. Since our launch, we have welcomed over 1,200 faculty, staff, and administrators from more than 500 institutions and organizations to join a broad and diverse community with a common purpose: educating character, and building communities of character, in higher education and beyond. In the 2024 grant cycle, [ECI awarded over \\$17.8 M to individuals and 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, minority-serving institutions, religiously affiliated colleges, and single-gender colleges—with the resources, funding, and support needed to integrate character education into their distinctive institutional contexts, curricula, and cultures. The broader aspiration is to foster a robust network 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 both

individuals and institutions. In 2025, funding for institutions will include up to **10 Institutional Impact Grants** of between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000 as well as **20 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. Funding for individuals is available through **Teacher-Scholar Grants** of up to \$15,000, which may be used to support research on character or character education in undergraduates or to develop resources that strengthen the capacity to educate character at the grantee's institution or in the larger network.

## II. AN INVITATION TO A COMMUNITY OF CHARACTER

### *A Time of Renewal for Character Education*

From their beginnings, many U.S. colleges and universities have included the formation of character among their central educational aims.<sup>1</sup> 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 an emphasis on character while honoring the diversity and pluralism that characterize American life. The response to our first Request for Proposals demonstrated the extraordinary appetite for this work, with 140 institutions submitting proposals for our 2024 grants.

Across institutional roles, responsibilities, and disciplines, college and university leaders are adopting a renewed focus on the vital 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 recent 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

values.”<sup>2</sup> Across several fields, scholars are advancing more sophisticated and practically relevant accounts of character, and experts have illuminated why 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 equitable and inclusive community, foster good leadership and citizenship, advance career preparation and vocational discernment, and encourage the responsible use of technology. In many cases, educating character can also support an institution’s efforts to fulfill its distinctive educational mission, values, and aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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. In recent years, colleges and universities have

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> These reasons were addressed in Michael Lamb, “Why Character?”, Educating Character Across the University Conference, Wake Forest University (December 2, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

increasingly reached out to solicit advice and share ideas about how to educate character in a university context. 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 to educate character within colleges and universities. Through the creation of a network 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 individuals and 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.

### ***Invitation to Community***

At the close of our first 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 launching this second Invitation to Community and 2025 Request for Proposals, and to 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 leaders from over 500 institutions and organizations. By creating and sustaining a broad-based network of individuals and institutions that serve faculty, staff, and students from different backgrounds, traditions, and disciplines, we seek to encourage diverse 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—including but not limited to research universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, military academies, minority-serving institutions, and single-gender colleges.

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 network and a collaborative community of practice where we learn from and with each other, so 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 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 across differences, assess and measure character education efforts, and design character-infused curricular and co-curricular programming; our ECI Book Club that meets regularly to discuss character-related books; and site visits to Wake Forest where ECI community members can learn about the approach to cultivating character developed by the Program for Leadership and Character.
- Attend and/or present at the bi-annual major conference of the Program for Leadership and Character. In December 2024, more than one hundred speakers will present on the theme of [Educating Character Across Differences: Cultivating Communities of Character in the University](#).
- Contribute to research and resources focused on educating character.
- [Apply for funding](#) to support your own research, programming, and/or professional development through one of three types of Educating Character Initiative grants (see the Request for Proposals below).

In addition to these opportunities, grant recipients and network participants 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 network of both 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 any simple “plug-and-play” approach, but it also promises more potential for success and sustainability.

The Educating Character Initiative welcomes diverse approaches to moral, civic, and/or intellectual character and encourages engagement that is motivated to promote character development according to the mission and vision of each institution and to meet each institution's unique population of faculty, staff, and students in context-sensitive ways.

### ***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 an inclusive 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

- *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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>

These strategies and others are embedded throughout the Program's curricular and 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 are in the process of compiling some [resources for character educators](#) that we are open to sharing.

We offer the above example of how the Program for Leadership and Character understands character education for illustrative purposes only. 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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

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

### III. ANNOUNCEMENT OF 2025 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

In 2025, the Educating Character Initiative intends to award grants to both individuals and institutions, varying in scale, focus, and expected impact.

#### ***Grants for Institutions***

In this grant cycle, we anticipate awarding up to **10 Institutional Impact Grants** of between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000, as well as **20 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.

To encourage an organic, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach, we seek to recognize the work already done to focus on character education and existing expertise at partner institutions. The Educating Character Initiative is prepared to offer context-specific support from Wake Forest staff, fellows, and consultants to aid institutions who seek to advance character education. 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.

#### ***Grants for Individuals***

In addition to grants to institutions, we will award up to **10 Teacher-Scholar Grants** of up to \$15,000 to individuals who wish to research character education in higher education, deepen our collective understanding of character, and/or expand their capacity to educate character in their contexts. We welcome applications from individuals at all U.S. colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations, or higher education organizations, including those whose institutions may not yet be part of the wider network. Project leaders and co-leaders of Institutional Impact or Capacity-Building Grants are not eligible for these individual grants, though other faculty and staff at the same institution who are not part of the proposed institutional project may do so.

Details about the three types of grants are below.



## 1. Institutional Impact Grants

**Up to 10 Institutional Impact Grants of between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000** will be awarded to institutions who wish to undertake a substantial and sustained effort to educate character in undergraduate populations across their institution. We expect to award three grants of between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000, three grants of between \$250,000 and \$500,000, and four grants of between \$100,000 and \$250,000.

Organizations should align the size of the request with the impact of the proposed project and 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, though we welcome innovative ideas that have not been fully tested.

We welcome applications from two- and four-year U. S. colleges and universities—both public and private, secular and religious—including but not limited to research universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, military academies, minority-serving institutions, and single-gender colleges. We also welcome applications from cross-institutional networks of colleges, universities, and organizations that wish to collaborate on a shared project or initiative.

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 funding 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 are available 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.

We encourage institutions to be creative in how they might design, implement, and integrate character education organically in their distinctive contexts.

A list of institutions and projects funded by 2024 ECI Institutional Impact Grants is available [here](#).

### ***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) (if applicable)
- Contact Information for Institutional Grant Approval and Payment
- Project Name and Abstract (500-word maximum)
- Amount Requested
- 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.
  - 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.
- A signed letter of support from the head of the institution, such as the president, chancellor, or vice-chancellor.
- A broad budget outline (a more detailed budget will be requested in the full proposal stage). Please note that, 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 or 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 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 number of students impacted by the proposed project
- The number of faculty, staff, and administrators impacted by the proposed project
- 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 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. Applicants are encouraged to determine how to show institutional support through cost-sharing and/or donor-matching where appropriate.

Initial applications (Letters of Inquiry) are due by **February 17, 2025, at 5:00 PM ET** through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). The portal will accept completed applications beginning December 11, 2024. Responses to the initial application are expected to be shared with applicants by April 15, 2025. All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit [ECI Grants](#).

The Educating Character Initiative team will host six, hour-long, online sessions in order to provide an overview of and answer questions about 2025 ECI Grants:

- November 20, 2024, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET
- December 12, 2024, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET
- January 9, 2025, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET

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

## **Step 2: Full Proposal**

Up to 20 institutions will be invited to submit a **full and final proposal by June 2, 2025, at 5:00 PM ET**. Project teams invited to submit final proposals can expect to be asked to produce revisions to the LOI narrative, timeline, or budget, more detailed versions of LOI requirements, and/or 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, with the term of the grant expected to begin on August 1. 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 applicants agree to [register as a member of the Educating Character Initiative community](#).

Colleges and universities should coordinate Institutional Impact 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 may not apply again this year. Individuals may not be awarded a Teacher-Scholar Grant if they are part of a team awarded a Capacity-Building Grant or if they are on a team invited to the final round of

Institutional-Impact Grant consideration. 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, up to **20 Capacity-Building Grants of up to \$50,000** will be awarded 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, that are envisioning discrete projects that do not require substantial funding, and/or that need support to plan for a larger grant application to the Educating Character Initiative or another funding organization in a future year.

We welcome applications from two- and four-year colleges and universities—both public and private, secular and religious—including but not limited to research universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, military academies, minority-serving institutions, and single-gender colleges. We also welcome applications from cross-institutional networks of colleges, universities, and organizations that wish to collaborate on a shared project or initiative.

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 are available 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 the Educating Character Initiative or other funding organizations.

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 2024 ECI Capacity-Building Grants is available [here](#).

### ***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) (if applicable)
- Contact Information for Institutional Grant Approval and Payment
- Project Name and Abstract (500-word maximum)
- Amount Requested (\$50,000 maximum)
- 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 in Summer 2025.
    - 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.
  - 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 17, 2025, at 5:00 PM ET** through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). The portal will accept completed applications beginning December 11, 2024. We anticipate the announcement of award decisions by May 15 for projects to begin July 1 or later. All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit [ECI Grants](#).

The Educating Character Initiative team will host six, hour-long, online sessions in order to provide an overview of and answer questions about 2025 ECI Grants:

- November 20, 2024, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET
- December 12, 2024, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET
- January 9, 2025, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET

[Register for an online session here](#). All inquiries should be directed toward [ECI@wfu.edu](mailto: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 applicants agree to [register as a member of the Educating Character Initiative community](#).

In most cases, institutions may apply for an Institutional Impact or Capacity-Building Grant, but not both. Individuals may not be awarded a Teacher-Scholar Grant if they are part of a team awarded a Capacity-Building Grant or if they are on a team invited to the final round of Institutional-Impact Grant consideration. 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.

### 3. Teacher-Scholar Grants

**Teacher-Scholar Grants (up to \$15,000 each)** will be awarded to individuals who wish to research character and/or character education in undergraduate education, develop specific projects or resources aimed at strengthening their institution's and the larger network's capacity to educate character effectively, and/or pursue professional development as a character educator. We welcome proposals on any project relevant to character in higher education, but preference will be given to those that focus on understanding why and how character education might support the educational mission of colleges and universities; examining strategies for cultivating character that are particularly relevant for undergraduate students; determining which measures are needed to assess character growth in emerging adults; and/or exploring how faculty and staff can integrate those strategies and measures into their disciplinary, curricular, and co-curricular offerings. This research could include theoretical and/or empirical research as well as practical research that applies these insights to different pedagogical, disciplinary, or institutional contexts.

This work will be vital not only in equipping university leaders with valuable resources but also demonstrating the value and impact of this work in ways that might support the larger community within higher education. Ultimately, these grants will support individuals in developing their scholarly expertise in character education, expand the pipeline of scholars doing research on character education in colleges and universities, and increase knowledge-sharing and pedagogical innovation across institutions, disciplines, and the network. We expect that some grantees may offer workshops or present research at ECI conferences and convenings, publish resources that could be useful for the larger network, and/or serve as consultants or advisory board members based on their expertise.

Teacher-Scholar Grant activities could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Course buy-outs, summer funding, or salary replacement for faculty to focus on research or pedagogical development related to character in higher education.
- Professional development support, such as travel funds to present research on character at conferences or get feedback on a book manuscript.
- Student research assistants (graduate or undergraduate).
- Books, materials, or software for research, assessment, or course development.
- Funds for the creation or dissemination of resources.
- Participant incentives to conduct studies.
- Partial support of a postdoctoral fellow (that could be matched with institutional or departmental support).

The Program for Leadership and Character will provide multiple opportunities for individuals 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.

### ***Application Instructions***

The full application will be available in the [ECI Grant Portal](#). You must provide:

- Contact Information for the Principal Investigator(s), Administrative Assistant (if applicable), and Department or Supervisor (if applicable)
- Project Name and Abstract (500-word maximum)
- Amount Requested (\$15,000 maximum)
- A description of the character approach to be used in the project (500-word maximum)
- A description of the core research, program, curricular, or other goals (500-word maximum)
- A description of project activities and explanation of why ECI support is necessary to complete these activities (250-word maximum)
- A description of target impact and outcomes, including how those outcomes will be assessed or measured, as well as expected scholarly publications or research products (500-word maximum)
- Curriculum vitae for the project leader(s), no more than 5 pages each. No photos, please.
- Project Timeline
- Budget, including (minimally) separate lines for personnel, travel and registration costs, books and research material costs, and other character-related training costs, separated by semester.

The submission deadline for the application is **January 3, 2025, at 5:00 PM ET** through the [ECI Grant Portal](#). The portal will accept completed applications beginning December 11, 2024. Award decisions are expected to be issued by February 17, 2025. All dates and deadlines are subject to change. For the latest information, please visit [ECI Grants](#).

The Educating Character Initiative team will host six, hour-long, online sessions in order to provide an overview of and answer questions about 2025 ECI Grants:

- November 20, 2024, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET
- December 12, 2024, 11am - 12 pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET
- January 9, 2025, 11am - 12pm ET and 12 - 1pm ET

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

### ***Grant Eligibility and Expectations for Funded Proposals***

The project leader(s) must be in a faculty or staff position at an accredited college or university in the United States or hold a relevant position in a registered nonprofit organization. Individual grants must be awarded through an institution or organization. All applicants agree to [register as a member of the Educating Character Initiative community](#).

Individuals may not be awarded a Teacher-Scholar Grant if they are part of a team awarded a Capacity-Building Grant or if they are on a team invited to the final round of Institutional-Impact Grant consideration.

Funded projects and project leaders will commit to the following:

- Attend check-in meetings with ECI staff, submit final reports, including any 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 have already begun 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 this next year and beyond, the ECI aspires to empower generative partnerships with and among individual faculty and staff and undergraduate 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

	Institutional Impact Grants	Capacity-Building Grants	Teacher-Scholar Grants
<b>Info Sessions (optional)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● November 20, 2024, 11am -12pm</li> <li>● November 20, 2024, 12 - 1pm</li> <li>● December 12, 2024, 11am -12pm</li> <li>● December 12, 2024, 12 - 1pm</li> <li>● January 9, 2025, 11am -12pm</li> <li>● January 9, 2025, 12 - 1pm</li> </ul> <p>All times Eastern. <a href="#">Register for a session here.</a></p>		
<b>Letter of Inquiry Due</b>	February 17, 2025	n/a	n/a
<b>Final Proposal Due</b>	June 2, 2025	March 17, 2025	January 2, 2025
<b>Grant Decisions</b>	July 1, 2025	May 15, 2025	February 17, 2025
<b>Grant Start Date</b>	August 1, 2025	July 1, 2025	June 1, 2025

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