



EDUCATING CHARACTER INITIATIVE

U.S. Colleges and Universities

2025 Project Brief

**EDUCATING CHARACTER INITIATIVE
U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
2025 PROJECT BRIEF**

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The Educating Character Initiative: An Invitation to Community

The Educating Character Initiative (ECI), a project of the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University, made possible by generous support from Lilly Endowment Inc., seeks to catalyze a movement for character education at colleges and universities across the United States. Through our work in grantmaking, collective learning, and community engagement, we equip institutions of higher education with the funding, resources, and support necessary to integrate character into their distinctive institutional contexts, curricula, and cultures.

Our broad aspiration is to enable institutions of higher education to become communities of character that form students, staff, and faculty to act with character and for the common good.



All of our work begins with an invitation to join in a shared project, to be in a community committed to a common effort.

Building a movement for character in higher education involves weaving together individual contributions into something beautiful. The fabric of our community is formed by individuals and institutions who draw upon their own traditions, cultures, missions, programming, and practices. As a whole, the ECI Community is emerging as a rich tapestry of partnerships, ideas, and opportunities for educating character.

The Character of Our Community

We aspire to be a community that lives out its values with integrity, courage, and hope. Our core commitments are:



Hospitality

We strive to foster a welcoming community, characterized by openness, presence, and reciprocity. We aim to establish rhythms of friendship and belonging, making space for new voices and ideas in conversation.



Humility

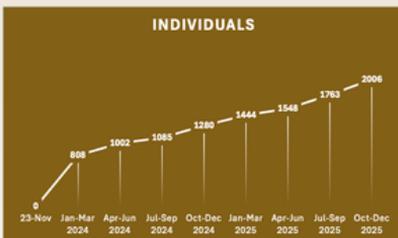
Character education is for all but not one-size-fits-all. Character is formed not in the abstract but in the concrete circumstances of institutions and communities. Context matters. We are committed to creating spaces where we can learn from and with each other about how to educate character across a wide range of settings in higher education.



Common Purpose

Educating character involves orienting individuals and institutions toward common goods – goods that lend stability, rootedness, and connection to one another. Locating, identifying, and naming these goods gives us an aspirational ideal and direction to guide our shared work.

The ECI Community has seen incredible growth since its launch. We currently have over 2,000 individuals representing more than 700 institutions, including 500+ U.S. colleges and universities.



The Shape of Our Work

Together, we seek practical answers to challenging questions as we build a movement for character education in higher education:

- *How can colleges and universities help students become people of character?*
- *How can we help our institutions become communities of character?*
- *How can individuals and institutions collaborate to shape a culture of character formation across the landscape of higher education?*

Programs

Our work operates across three primary lanes of activity: grantmaking, collective learning, and community engagement.

GRANTMAKING

We award grants to institutions, varying in scale, focus, and expected impact, including Institutional Impact Grants (\$100,000 - \$1,000,000) and Capacity-Building Grants (up to \$50,000).

COLLECTIVE LEARNING

We design learning experiences such as webinars, workshops, and book clubs, and create resources to address needs emerging from the community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We cultivate partnerships of shared purpose through coaching, consultations, convenings, conferences, and communities of practice.

Learn about our active 2026 funding initiative



Grantmaking and ECI Grantee Institutions

The ECI has awarded over \$35M in grants to a wide range of public and private colleges and universities, including major research universities, liberal arts colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, faith-based institutions, and community colleges.

CB = Capacity-Building II = Institutional Impact + = Multi-institutional Grant

Arizona State University (2024 II)	Fairleigh Dickinson University (2024 CB)
Arkansas State University (2024 CB)	Florida Atlantic University (2025 CB)
Auburn University at Montgomery (2024 CB)	Florida Institute of Technology (2025 CB)
Austin Community College (2024 CB, 2025 II)	Fort Lewis College (2024 CB, 2025 II)
Ball State University (2025 II)	Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University (2024 CB)
Bard College (2025 CB)	Franciscan University of Steubenville (2024 II +)
Baylor University (2024 CB, 2024 CB +, 2025 II)	Friends University (2025 CB)
Bellarmine University (2024 CB, 2025 II)	Furman University (2025 CB)
Belmont University (2024 II)	Geneva College (2025 II)
Brandeis University (2024 II)	George Fox University (2024 II)
Bryn Mawr College (2025 II)	Georgetown College (2025 CB)
California State University, Bakersfield (2025 II +)	Gordon College (2025 CB)
California State University, Los Angeles (2024 II +)	Harvard University (2024 II, 2025 II+)
Calvin University (2025 II)	Hildegard College (2024 CB)
Campbell University (2024 II)	Hope College (2024 II)
Carleton College (2024 CB)	Howard University (2024 CB +, 2025 II)
Carnegie Mellon University (2025 CB)	Indiana University, Indianapolis (2025 CB)
Carson-Newman University (2024 CB)	King University (2024 II)
Carthage College (2025 CB)	Lee University (2024 CB)
Catholic University of America (2024 II)	Lincoln University (2024 CB +)
City University of New York, Medgar Evers College (2024 CB, 2025 II)	Loyola Marymount University (2025 II)
Clafin University (2025 CB)	Loyola University, Chicago (2025 CB)
Clarke University (2024 CB)	Mercer University (2025 CB)
Colorado School of Mines (2024 II+)	Miami University, Ohio (2024 CB)
Columbia University (2025 CB)	Middle Georgia State University (2024 CB)
Cornell University (2025 CB)	Montclair State University (2024 II)
Davidson College (2024 CB, 2024 CB +, 2025 II)	Mount Mary University (2025 CB)
DePauw University (2025 II+)	National Louis University (2024 CB)
Duke University (2025 CB +)	New Jersey Institute of Technology (2025 CB)
Elms College (2024 CB)	North Carolina Central University (2025 CB +)
Emory University (2025 CB)	North Central College (2025 CB)

Grantmaking and ECI Grantee Institutions

CB = Capacity-Building II = Institutional Impact += Multi-institutional Grant

North Park University (2024 CB)	University of California, Santa Barbara (2024 CB)
Ohio University (2025 CB)	University of Chicago (2024 CB)
Olin College of Engineering (2025 CB)	University of Dayton (2025 CB +)
Pepperdine University (2025 II)	University of Delaware (2024 CB, 2025 II)
Providence College (2024 CB)	University of Dubuque (2024 CB, 2025 II)
Purdue University (2024 II +)	University of Florida (2024 CB)
Radford University (2024 CB, 2025 II)	University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign (2025 CB)
Rhodes College (2024 CB)	University of Kansas (2024 CB, 2025 II)
Roanoke College (2025 CB)	University of Memphis (2025 CB)
Saint Catherine University (2025 CB)	University of Mississippi (2024 II)
Saint Mary's College of California (2024 CB)	University of New Hampshire (2024 II +)
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota (2025 CB)	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (2024 CB, 2025 II)
Saint Olaf College (2025 II)	University of North Carolina, Pembroke (2025 CB)
Saint Philip's College (2025 II+)	University of Notre Dame (2024 II)
Salem College (2024 CB, 2025 II)	University of Pennsylvania (2024 II, 2024 CB +)
Santa Clara University (2024 CB)	University of Portland (2025 CB)
Santa Fe College (2025 II+)	University of South Carolina, Columbia (2025 CB)
Seattle Pacific University (2024 II)	University of Saint Thomas (2025 II)
Seattle University (2025 II)	University of Texas, San Antonio (2024 CB)
Seton Hill University (2024 CB, 2025 II)	University of the South (2025 CB)
Sinclair Community College (2025 CB +)	University of Tulsa (2024 II)
Southern Methodist University (2025 CB)	University of Virginia (2024 CB, 2024 II, 2025 II)
Southern Wesleyan University (2025 CB)	Utah State University (2024 CB, 2025 II)
Stanford University (2025 II+)	Villanova University (2024 CB, 2025 II)
State University of New York (2025 CB)	Virginia Tech (2024 II +)
Syracuse University (2025 II)	Warren Wilson College (2024 CB)
Taylor University (2025 CB)	Westmont College (2025 CB)
Tufts University (2024 CB)	Wheaton College (2024 II +)
Tulane University (2025 CB)	Whitworth University (2024 II)
Tuskegee University (2024 II+, 2024 II+)	Wright State University (2025 CB)
United States Military Academy (2024 II +)	Yale University (2024 CB +)
United States Naval Academy (2024 II)	
University of Alabama (2025 CB)	
University of California, Berkeley (2024 II)	
University of California, Irvine (2024 II)	

Collective Learning

A Listening Tour

In 2025, our team facilitated a community listening tour to better understand what is working well among ECI grantees, identify challenges, and gather suggestions from relevant stakeholders for the continued development of the Educating Character Initiative. Here are a few of the many threads emerging from these conversations:

- 1. Character education is not triage.** Institutions share a clear and stable commitment to educating character in a way that is relevant, though not solely reactive, to current political and cultural needs, tensions, and complexities.
- 2. Small groups are building a movement.** Institutional teams are organizing for change through both sustained cohorts and newly-formed, small working groups. These groups are driving institutional change and are emerging as the foremost formative space across projects.
- 3. Centering students deepens and extends the effort.** Some of the most exciting efforts involve teams who are centering students in their efforts, not merely as a target of formation but as partners and collaborators in program development.
- 4. Building institutional capacity is slow, careful work.** Contextualized character-building efforts require sustained effort in building institutional commitment and capacity. This work takes time, depth, and patience to build the relationships and structures to educate character wisely and well.
- 5. Character education moves beyond the surface.** Institutional teams are working to ensure that their efforts are not mere box-checking or “virtue-signaling” exercises. Projects team are showing willingness to go below the surface to form students at their core.



An Emerging Orientation

Through engagement with the larger ECI Community, the Educating Character Initiative team is ready to name an emerging orientation to character: **Character for Wholeness.**

Educating character forms people with deep, enduring dispositions that structure how they think, feel, and act in pursuit of what is good. Character-building efforts influence our perceptions and patterns of attention, thought, imagination, and reasoning; our motivations, cares, and commitments; our feelings and emotions; and our ways of being and acting in the world.

Educating character enables us to live fully and completely with and in community; to live an undivided, unified, and integrated life, both individually and with others; and to become individuals who heal, restore, and repair the wounds that affect our individual and communal lives. Forming good character keeps us from living fragmented lives, from living with division, discord, or disintegration individually and collectively, and from causing or ignoring the brokenness within and around us.

In short, character education shapes persons and communities for greater wholeness.



Save the Date!
Educating Character
Initiative Conference
December 3-5, 2026

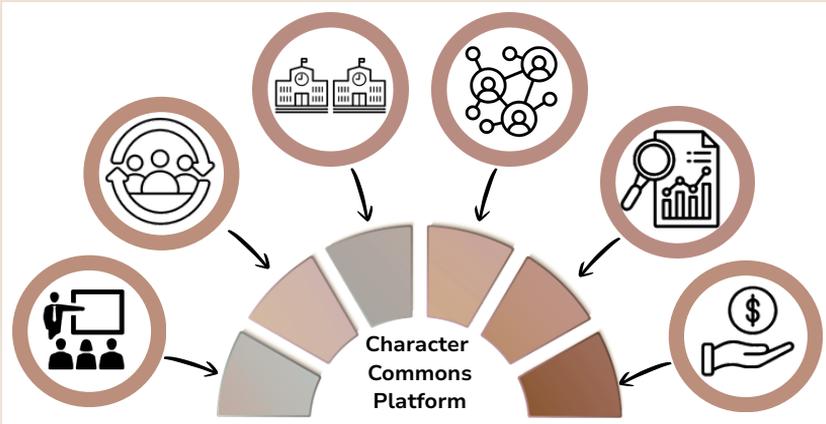
Community Engagement

What's on the Horizon?

Communities of Impact

Our next phase involves efforts to empower ECI Community-driven initiatives. In 2026, we will begin launching communities of impact, each composed of members from multiple institutions, united by a shared concern or interest, who seek to deepen our understanding while expanding our capacity to educate character. We are interested in hearing from you about particular communities of impact you'd like to join or cultivate. Have an idea? Send it to eci@wfu.edu.

A Community Platform



To become a catalyst for transformative change at universities and beyond, we are building a platform capable of meeting the needs of a growing movement. In 2026, we will launch a Character Commons Platform designed to host accessible and practical resources for character education. The platform will also provide scaffolding for connection and community building, shared research projects, and a way for philanthropic organizations to find and fund innovative programs.

An Invitation

We are excited and grateful to see beautiful work happening across the ECI Community as teams, institutions, and cross-institutional collaborations infuse character programming in a wide range of contexts. Together, we're working to become communities of character that shape students, staff, and faculty and transform our institutions for the common good.

Catalyzing a movement for character education across higher education is a common project that requires depth of thought, commitment, and relationship. It requires a community.

Scan to join the
ECI Community



Members receive a monthly newsletter featuring stories about the good work happening across our community, along with access to events, resources, funding opportunities, and more.

We invite you to join our community, not only for what you might gain but what you might offer. We need you for this work. And we look forward to learning with and from you as we strive together to become people and communities of character.





THE PROGRAM FOR
**LEADERSHIP AND
CHARACTER**