



Educating Character Initiative: Building Communities of Impact Across Higher Education

Communities of Impact Grants

Request for Proposals

The [Educating Character Initiative](#) at the [Program for Leadership and Character](#) at Wake Forest University is excited to launch a new funding opportunity supporting Communities of Impact (Col) for character education. These new ECI Communities of Impact Grants will award up to \$75,000 to seed and sustain intentional communities organized around a timely concern or aim in character education at U.S. colleges and universities. Each will be thoughtfully designed for hospitality and collaboration and oriented toward impact on character for the common good. The broader aspiration of these grants is to advance a movement in character education across the higher education landscape.

We welcome applications from multi-institutional higher education teams and cross-institutional networks of colleges, universities, and organizations that wish to collaborate on a shared project. For example, given past convenings hosted by the ECI, as well as conversations with our team, we expect interest in Cols focused on character in college athletics, the creation of new measurements to assess character, character at faith-based institutions, character and student affairs, character and community engagement, and many more. Requests for funding should be focused on the formation of a Col for the purposes of engaging focal themes concerning character education; examining and expanding the concepts, perspectives, and frameworks that guide character education; developing and deepening the pedagogies, practices, conditions, and structures that powerfully shape character; and creating character resources in support of educators in higher education.

ECI Communities of Impact Grants are made possible by generous funding from the John Templeton Foundation and Lilly Endowment Inc. as well as the ongoing institutional support of Wake Forest University.

A separate [request for proposals for ECI 2027 grants for institutions](#) is available [on our](#)

[website](#). In 2027, 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 to develop the moral, civic, and/or intellectual character of faculty, staff, and students, and institutions.

What are Communities of Impact?

Our approach to Communities of Impact is drawn from two primary lines of thought. The first is the now well-established work on “communities of practice.” In keeping with the communities of practice approach, Cols will have:

- A defined *domain* - a shared concern, pursuit, or aspiration that defines the scope of the questions or problems taken up by the group. The domain locates the group in the landscape of character and provides a focal point and touchstone for the efforts of the group.
- *Structures, commitments, and characteristic qualities* adopted by the group that will enable it to develop a thriving group culture and function well in its work. We anticipate teams committing to shared leadership, a posture of welcome and openness to new voices, and an investment in early career scholars and practitioners through friendship and mentoring opportunities.
- Aims that operate through the shared *practice* of their community. Each group will focus on developing their practice and sharing the results of their learning through a reporting process, resources, and storytelling initiatives.

Because the primary aims of Cols will be to set a foundation for and catalyze *impact* in their lane of concern, we also draw upon a second line of thought from the work of collective impact organizations to understand how these groups might move beyond conversation towards common action. Practically speaking, what this means is that Communities of Impact will be designed to:

- *Identify and empower leaders* in the landscape of higher education to address the needs of the character education community.
- *Create opportunities for collaborative learning* through publication, convenings, conferences, and workshops, both at the home institutions of members of the Col and on the national and international stage.
- *Produce practical, adaptable, publicly sharable resources* that address the character formation needs of faculty, staff, and administration.
- *Engage in ongoing landscape analysis of the character community*, providing perspective on challenges and opportunities and generating novel questions for inquiry and research that directly support character-building projects at institutions of higher education and beyond.
- Contribute to the larger effort by *providing a scholarly and organizational backbone* for all Cols, including representation in a group serving as a Communities of Impact Collaborative across all domain-specific Cols.

Membership within Communities of Impact will be drawn from faculty, graduate students, staff, and administrators from the character education community.

Expectations and Eligibility

Each Col is expected to work together for a minimum of one year. During this time, Cols will be expected to:

- develop a shared set of commitments relevant to (1) the domain or question that anchors their shared work and (2) the core qualities shaping how they engage together as a community of character;
- invite new voices, institutional roles, institutions, or organizations into their shared work, including those who are not presently part of the ECI Community, as well as incorporate structures for mentoring early-career scholars and educators where possible;
- establish a regular meeting schedule for engaging together online or in person;
- select a representative from their community of practice to serve on the Col Collaborative, which will include representatives from other Cols;
- organize and host at least one in-person convening centered on the questions, issues, or challenges grounding their shared work;
- create outputs and deliverables to address particular challenges, questions, needs, or opportunities facing character educators;
- maintain a profile on a community platform managed by ECI;
- produce at least one practical character resource (and likely more) for educators – white papers, syllabi, measurement toolkits, best practices, learning modules, and other high-quality materials for collective learning – and uploading these resources to a community platform managed by ECI and made publicly available to all;
- represent the group's work in public forums (conferences, public scholarship, the annual Education Character Initiative Col summit, and so on);

Outstanding Cols will be eligible to apply for *sustaining funds* for work beyond the initial year in the form of grants for up to an additional \$75,000.

We anticipate that inquiries across Cols will seed new Communities of Impact (spin-off Cols) that take up important, emerging themes and focal concerns crucial to meeting the needs of the current moment in higher education. In such cases, members from an existing Col may submit a separate request for additional grant funding for a new Col.

Leadership within a proposed Col must be in or contracted to a long-term faculty or staff position at an accredited college or university in the United States, or alternatively, a representative of a higher-ed serving non-profit organization based in the United States with

established relationships at colleges and universities and a mission aligned with character education.

Eligibility for this opportunity requires [registering as a member of the Educating Character Initiative Community](#) by all Col leaders and members. Registration is free and will give you access to events, opportunities for conversation and learning, and resources for educating character. We are an international network and a collaborative community 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.

Scope of Col-Funded Activities

Col Grant funding will support a wide range of activities, including stipends for Col leaders and the creation of high-quality resources that can equip, empower, and advance the work of educating character in higher education.

Col Grant proposals may request up to \$25,000 for travel and lodging as well as up to \$50,000 for all other grant activities. The maximum total award is \$75,000.

Proposed Cols will work for a minimum of 1 year on shared projects.

Project budgets should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Funds for organizing at least one in-person convening, including funds for travel and lodging for Col members.
- Funds for travel for Col representatives to participate in an in-person summit at Wake Forest in Fall 2026 and/or Fall 2028.
- Stipends for Col leaders, including an additional stipend for a member who will serve as the Col representative on the Col Collaborative.
- Development of high-quality, practitioner-focused resources for educating character to be hosted on a community platform for wide dissemination across the ECI Community.

Project budgets may include, but are not limited to, some or all of the following:

- Stipends for Col members.
- Funds for at least one member of the ECI staff to travel to a Col in-person convening.
- The purchase of books and materials for shared learning or convenings.
- Honoraria for speakers to engage with the Col, lead a workshop on character and related pedagogical strategies, provide insight on how character might be integrated in distinctive contexts, or contribute to a convening to generate interest in character education.

- Professional development support.
- Support for research studies that directly address questions related to the Col or provide support for integrating character more effectively within your area.

Due to limited funding, the following are not allowable expenses on Col Grants: general overhead, fringe on stipends, or indirect costs.

Application Instructions

The Educating Character Initiative will receive applications on a rolling basis, with announcements concerning awarded grants occurring quarterly. For the latest information, please [visit the ECI Request for Proposals: Communities of Impact Grants page](#). Please direct any questions to eci.coi@wfu.edu.

The application for ECI Community of Impact Grants must be made through [the submission portal on the Educating Character Initiative website](#).

The ECI does not approve the use of generative and/or assistive AI in the composition of grant proposals.

Please prepare the following items for submission:

General Information

- Community of Impact Project Title
- Community of Impact Abstract (50-100 words, written for a general audience to be published on the community platform)
- Amount Requested (up to \$75,000). Applicants may request up to \$50,000 for project activities along with additional funding for travel and lodging associated with project activities. Travel costs may not exceed \$25,000.

Primary Institution or Organization

- Primary Institution or Organization Information (the single college, university, or organization that will be responsible for signing the subaward agreement, receiving all funds from ECI, submitting reports, and initiating any further subawards to additional partners as needed)
 - Name of Institution or Organization
 - Name of Character Program at Institution (if applicable)
 - Primary Mailing Address
 - Website
 - Type of Institution - community college, public university, private university, HBCU, religious college, TCU (tribal college or university), other

- Institutional Accreditor (if applicable)
- Accreditation Status
- Accreditation Renewal Date
- Project Leader at the Institution
 - Name
 - Title
 - Email
- Administrative or Grants Point of Contact
 - Name
 - Title
 - Email

Partner Institutions

- Partner Institutions or Organizations (the following is required for all partners)
 - Name of Institution or Organization
 - Name of Character Program at Institution (if applicable)
 - Primary Mailing Address
 - Website
 - Type of Institution - community college, public university, private university, HBCU, religious college, TCU (tribal college or university), other
 - Institutional Accreditor (if applicable)
 - Accreditation Renewal Date
 - Project Leader at the Institution
 - Name
 - Title
 - Email

Impact and Objectives

- Project objectives: Objectives are specific and measurable steps taken to achieve your broad, long-term outcomes. Please avoid listing activities and/or tasks. A minimum of three objectives are required to submit the application. Please note that you will be asked to report against these objectives at the end of the subaward period of performance should you secure this funding.

Uploads

- Proposal (3-page maximum, PDF format, titled “[Primary Institution Name]-Proposal Narrative, [Year]”):
 - A brief overview of the aims of the Col related to educating character and character formation in college or university students.
 - A clear rationale for the alignment between the proposed Col and the broad

vision of the Educating Character Initiative, e.g., articulating contributions to one or more of the following long-term outcomes:

- character is more broadly integrated into curricular and co-curricular programming across disciplines, functions, and organizational roles within colleges and universities (e.g., new majors, minors, certificate programs; substantial changes to existing curricula across majors, minors, certificate programs, first-year seminar/experience courses, and core or general education curricula; program learning outcomes; new or redesigned courses; student learning objectives; pedagogical toolkits; tagging of courses in university curricular systems; new or redesigned student programming in residence life; student conduct; academic and professional advising; athletics; Greek life; new or redesigned student leadership training);
 - character and character programming are embedded more broadly within institutional cultures (e.g., policies and processes, mission and vision statements, strategic planning, quality enhancement plans, university marketing and communications, hiring practices and onboarding, promotion and advancement criteria, alumni profiles and engagement, etc.);
 - colleges or universities increasingly become institutions capable of fulfilling a character-focused mission.
- A plan for how you will assess the success of your efforts in alignment with these long-term outcomes.
 - A detailed description and plan for the community, to include a:
 - list of all initial participants, including any graduate students and early-career faculty and staff
 - plan for online/onsite gathering(s)
 - statement of how participants will promote mentorship opportunities through their work
 - timeline
 - indication of the necessary logistics to fulfill project goals, especially in providing a prospectus of the kinds of practical resources the community anticipates developing as a result of their work.
 - An indication of how organizers would like ECI staff to be involved, including but not limited to options such as the following:
 - attend/participate/be part of the convening
 - make a presentation related to the topic of the convening or community of practice

- lead a faculty development workshop on [please specify] at a convening
 - lead a staff development workshop on [please specify] at a convening
 - be present for conversation about specific topics in character education at a convening or community of practice [please specify]
 - consult on ideas related to topics in character education at a convening or community of practice gathering [please specify]
 - other [please specify]
- A budget of proposed costs (Excel format, titled “[Primary Institution Name]-Budget, [Year]”). Travel (airfare, ground transportation, lodging, and GSA rate per diem for meals) must be separated from all other costs and may not exceed \$25,000. Up to \$50,000 may be used for the other work of the grant such as stipends, convening costs, and resource development. A [recommended budget template can be found here](#).
 - Budget narrative (PDF format, titled “[Primary Institution Name]-Budget Narrative, [Year]”)
 - CVs of all organizers in a single PDF not to exceed 5 pages per CV (titled “[Primary Institution Name]-CVs, [Year]”; No photos, please).
 - Proof of accreditation of the primary institution (if it’s a college or university)

Grant Recipient Commitments

Those awarded funding will commit to the following:

- Articulating a full description of the Col, including its focal concerns, the core character qualities of the community, its developmental lifecycle (including plans for sustaining the work if applicable), its proposed practical outputs and deliverables, and its membership.
- Maintaining profiles on ECI’s community platform for member institutions and a collaboration profile publicly outlining the work of the Col.
- Uploading practical resources created through Col effort to a shared community platform for wide public dissemination.
- Completing a report about the Col for ECI staff in a form that may be shared with the ECI Community and funders as part of its annual reporting.
- Notifying the Educating Character Initiative of any significant events, presentations, or awards related to this work; submitting copies of all published work or other public products to the Educating Character Initiative; and acknowledging the Educating Character Initiative and Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University in project publications in accordance with the terms and conditions in the subagreement.

We are excited about the launch of this Communities of Impact initiative and eager to see how it will further catalyze the movement to educate character within higher education.