



Growing in Faith in The Age of Artificial Intelligence Initiative

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES (updated March)

Lilly Endowment is pleased to announce its invitational Growing in Faith in the Age of Artificial Intelligence Initiative (Faith and AI Initiative). The aim of the initiative is to help youth and young adults draw on the wisdom of Christian traditions and engage in spiritual practices to navigate the complexities of digital technologies, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications, enhance their overall well-being and deepen their faith.

Invited charitable organizations may submit proposals for **up to \$2.5 million each** that may be used for **up to a five-year period** to develop or enhance programs that advance three objectives:

1. Engage young people in conversations about how they use digital technologies, especially AI applications, and examine how these technologies shape their lives.
2. Identify sources of wisdom and spiritual practices from Christian traditions and explore how they may help young people address challenges posed by digital technologies.
3. Create new and/or expand current opportunities, as well as produce resources, to enable young people to draw on these sources of wisdom and engage in these spiritual practices to enhance their spiritual and overall well-being, deepen their faith, and promote ways of life that help them flourish.

Invited charitable organizations may submit proposals through a two-stage process:

Stage 1 Planning Grants: Invited charitable organizations may submit proposals for planning grants of **up to \$75,000** that may be used to design programs that are aligned with the initiative's aim and three objectives described above and to prepare a proposal to implement their plans. More information regarding the preparation and submission of planning grant proposals may be found on pages 5-7. The Endowment will review proposals for planning grants **on a rolling basis until April 15, 2026**.

Stage 2 Implementation Grants: Invited organizations may submit proposals for grants of **up to \$2.5 million** that may be used for up to a five-year period to implement programs designed during the planning stage. More information regarding the preparation and submission of implementation grant proposals may be found on pages 7-10. Implementation grant proposals are due **by August 21, 2026**.

Background

Numerous researchers, educators, civic leaders, journalists, religious leaders and healthcare workers, among others, are raising national awareness and concerns about the ways that digital technologies have transformed the lives of youth. In his seminal work, *The Anxious Generation* (2024), for example, Jonathan Haidt observes that digital technologies and devices, especially social media and smart phones, encourage youth to cultivate superficial relationships that undermine the social relationships that are crucial for psychological and social

development, contributing significantly to rising levels of loneliness, anxiety, fragility and other negative effects. The heavy use of these technologies also undermines their overall well-being and contributes greatly to social polarization.

The rapid emergence of AI is accelerating and amplifying these challenges, especially as recent studies indicate that youth are increasingly using AI chatbots to provide for their social and emotional needs. These advanced chatbots are specially designed to speak and feel like humans and to offer validation and comfort without fatigue, judgment or distraction. Widely circulated recent news stories note that young people are increasingly experimenting with and using “AI companions” as friends, romantic partners, mentors, and even as therapists and spiritual guides.

These accounts, as well as many others, provide glimpses into the ways that digital technologies are changing (both for good and bad) how young people, as well as others, live and interact with peers, family, teachers, neighbors and other people. For those with access to the internet, for example, digital technologies provide constant and immediate access to extensive information and help people stay connected with each other, and smart phones and other devices have become inextricably linked to school, work and social relationships. Youth who have grown up with these digital technologies have little or no experience of life before social media and the widespread use of digital devices. In recent years, researchers, mental healthcare professionals, educators, religious leaders, policy makers and parents have become increasingly concerned about the ways digital technologies are affecting the well-being and mental health of youth. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General released a special advisory report, titled “Social Media and Youth Mental Health,” which sounded a nation-wide alarm about young people’s well-being. The report said, “Up to 95 percent of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media ‘almost constantly.’” Moreover, “Nearly 70 percent of parents say parenting is now more difficult than it was 20 years ago, with technology and social media as the top two cited reasons.”

Haidt and other researchers have observed that religious traditions have much to contribute to helping young people, as well as others, navigate challenges posed by the ubiquitous presence and use of digital technologies. Furthermore, many young people are looking toward spirituality to help them address the loneliness and isolation they feel because of overreliance on digital technologies. According to researchers, young people intuitively turn to their devices, apps, social media and online forums for guidance and social connection. However the digital technologies that they use to address their spiritual questions often emphasize image over authenticity, self-optimization over self-sacrifice, and fluid, non-committal relationships over commitment. If not grounded in the wisdom and practices of religious traditions, these digital resources and applications can ultimately leave young people yearning for deeper senses of meaning, for moral clarity and for places where they can form substantive relationships and find belonging and community. Scholars, journalists and commentators have also noted that ‘do-it-yourself’ spirituality in disembodied, online spaces is leading many young people to seek embodied sacred spaces, such as churches and other religious sites, where they can explore the deep wisdom of religious traditions. In these embodied spaces, young people encounter and engage in religious practices, rituals and rites of passage grounded in the wisdom of religious traditions, find trustworthy religious leaders who can serve as their guides, and build communities of meaning and belonging with others.

Through the Faith and AI Initiative, the Endowment seeks to encourage and assist Christian communities and faith-based organizations in designing, testing and implementing approaches to reach middle school and high school-age youth and young adults and help them discover and draw on wisdom and engage in spiritual

practices from Christian traditions as they discern how best to use digital technologies and AI applications in their daily lives. The Endowment believes that these kinds of efforts are critical today to enhance the spiritual and overall well-being of young people, promote ways of life that help them flourish and deepen their faith.

Proposal Design Considerations

The Endowment encourages organizations to develop programs that attend carefully to and will advance the initiative's aim and three objectives and that make sense for their missions and constituents. The Endowment is especially interested in supporting proposals that provide evidence that organizations have considered the following in designing their programs and preparing their proposals.

- **Engaging middle school and high school-age youth and/or young adults in conversations about how they use digital technologies, especially AI applications, and examine how these technologies shape their lives.**

Before designing their programs, the Endowment encourages organizations to engage youth and young adults directly in conversations and to review recent research to learn about the different ways that young people are using digital technologies today and how these technologies are shaping their daily lives. Published research can be helpful for understanding general trends about emerging technologies and different usage patterns for various generational cohorts. But many contextual factors influence how different groups of young people live and use digital technologies. Therefore, a program's design should reflect a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural contexts of the young people whom the program intends to support. The organization's program may focus on specific ages, social and cultural contexts, ecclesial traditions and geographic regions, or the program's scope might be broader in any of these areas. Ultimately, the program should engage young people interpersonally and relationally and help them reflect on how their current uses of digital technologies are aligned or misaligned with their faith.

- **Identifying sources of wisdom and spiritual practices from Christian practices and explore how they may help young people address challenges posed by digital technologies**

As they design their programs, the Endowment encourages organizations to identify and consider carefully sources of wisdom and spiritual practices from their ecclesial and theological traditions that may be helpful and relevant today to help young people understand and navigate the moral and ethical dimensions of the uses of digital technologies in their daily lives.

While numerous ethicists and theologians are discussing ethical dimensions relating to AI, one example of a new faith-based ethical framework that draws directly on wisdom from Christian traditions to help discern appropriate uses of AI applications is called DELTA. Developed by the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Ethics and the Common Good, the DELTA framework asks, "What makes a human life worth living, and how is this unique, valuable and distinct from what technology offers us?" It answers these questions by drawing on five faith-based principles that form the mnemonic DELTA: Dignity (recognition of the value and dignity of all people), Embodiment (recognition of the value and importance of physical encounters and face-to-face social relationships), Love (recognition of the value and importance of God's call to love and serve others), Transcendence (recognition of the value and importance of awe and wonder and for humans to connect with something beyond themselves), and Agency (recognition of the value and importance for individual humans to make their own moral

choices). As organizations consider the sources of Christian wisdom that will guide young people, they can, if they choose, build on the DELTA framework and develop each of the five DELTA principles in ways that align with their own theological traditions. [The DELTA framework is described more fully in this webpage: DELTA | Faith-Based Frameworks for AI Ethics | Programs | Ethics and the Common Good | University of Notre Dame.](#)

Throughout history, Christians have engaged in a wide variety of spiritual practices to nourish their daily lives and enhance their overall well-being. Tangible Christian practices like service, sabbath keeping, prayer, forgiveness, hospitality, discernment and worship help to cultivate and nurture the biblical fruits of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23) like joy, kindness, love, peace, patience, faithfulness, goodness and self-control as well as other qualities like honesty, selflessness, and generosity. Whereas online ‘do-it-yourself’ spirituality is fragmented and often leaves young people yearning for more, substantive Christian faith when practiced robustly through embodied face-to-face interactions and relationships satisfies deep, spiritual longings. Christian practices also help young people lead lives that are centered and provide antidotes to loneliness, insecurity, anxiety, isolation, purposelessness and the other negative effects that researchers, like Haidt, have associated with digital technologies. By engaging consistently in various Christian practices, young people can navigate the digital landscape and discern whether, when and how to use apps and devices and engage online spaces. Ultimately, Christian practices help young people flourish by rooting their social, mental, and spiritual well-being in Christian wisdom and community.

- **Creating new and/or expanding current opportunities, as well as producing resources, to enable young people to draw on these sources of wisdom and engage in spiritual practices from Christian traditions to enhance their spiritual and overall well-being, promote ways of life that help them flourish and deepen their faith.**

As they design their programs, organizations are encouraged to consider the various settings that attract the youth and/or young adults they seek to reach and serve and the variety of opportunities in these settings for engaging these young people. Organizations also should consider the many individuals, as well as organizations, that contribute to young people’s flourishing and help them grow in faith. A partial list includes peers, mentors, parents, pastors, teachers, counselors and coaches, as well as youth-serving organizations, congregations, and other places where young people invest their time and energy both on- and off-line. In their program designs, organizations should provide strategies for reaching young people and resources for helping individuals and organizations that support them. For example, a program might host technology-free spiritual retreats where young people can engage in Christian practices of discernment and sabbath-keeping. Organizations should design programs that engage young people directly and include strong recruitment strategies and compelling activities and opportunities that will encourage young people’s participation and commitment to the program. Organizations also might design programs that produce curriculum and other resources for pastors and religious leaders, peer-learning opportunities for parents, and/or school teachers to help them create or enhance opportunities to engage young people under their care.

Selection Criteria

The Endowment intends to award grants to organizations that demonstrate that they have the commitment and capacity to design, implement and sustain creative and high-quality programs that advance the initiative’s

aim and objectives. Among other criteria, funding decisions will take into consideration the extent to which an organization demonstrates or provides the following:

1. A clear understanding of current digital technologies and emerging AI applications and the theological and ethical dimensions about the uses of these technologies.
2. A clear understanding of the ways that young people are using digital technologies, including AI applications, and how their uses are shaping their daily lives for good and ill.
3. A thoughtful exposition of the wisdom and practices from Christian traditions that the organization will deploy to help young people navigate how best to use digital technologies in their daily lives.
4. A clear plan for helping young people draw on wisdom and engage in Christian practices to enhance their well-being and help them grow in their faith.
5. A coherent and compelling design for reaching and engaging young people.
6. A clear statement of the program's anticipated outcomes, the appropriate performance indicators for gauging the program's progress toward these outcomes and a sound plan for collecting and analyzing data about the performance indicators to track this progress.
7. A credible plan for how the organization will raise funds and identify resources needed to continue the program, if successful, beyond the end of the grant period.

Although the Endowment hopes that all invited organizations submit compelling implementation proposals and receive funding to implement their programs, an invitation to submit a proposal is not a guarantee of funding. Grant funding is at the complete discretion of the Endowment.

The Endowment encourages each organization to apply for an amount appropriate to its capacity, the needs of the proposed program and the organization's ability to sustain its program beyond the end of the grant period. An organization should have no expectation that additional Endowment funding will be available to sustain its program after the grant period ends.

Stage One: Planning Grant Request Guidelines

Invited organizations may submit requests for planning grants of **up to \$75,000 each**. Organizations may use planning grant funds to engage in conversations with young people, examine recent research about emerging digital technologies and AI applications and their impacts on youth and young adults, engage consultants and subject-matter experts, identify and study Christian sources of wisdom and practices, explore potential collaborations with other organizations, design programs that will advance the initiative's aim and objectives and prepare proposals for funding to implement their plans.

The Endowment will host a mid-planning grant webinar for representatives of organizations that receive planning grants through the Faith and AI Initiative. During the webinar, representatives from invited organizations will, among other things, discuss their planning progress with Endowment staff, hear from and interact with expert consultants about digital technologies and AI, learn about the DELTA faith-based ethical framework and share insights with and learn from other leaders designing similar programs for youth and young adults.

A complete planning grant request must include the elements described below. *Please note that The Guide to Budget Preparation, all required forms and a sample IRS Exempt Status Determination Letter are provided on the Faith and AI initiative's webpage on Lilly Endowment's website.*

Official Request Letter: This **one-page** letter requesting a planning grant must be signed by the organization's chief executive officer and the chair of its governing board. The letter should provide a high-level summary of why the organization is interested in participating in this initiative and its initial concepts regarding a potential Faith and AI program that will advance the initiative's aim and objectives. The letter also should describe briefly the organization's anticipated planning activities and should specify the amount requested from the Endowment.

Information Form: This form, which is provided on the initiative's webpage, requests key information about the proposal and the individuals responsible for the planning activities. *Please note that organizations are asked to update and resubmit this form with their implementation grant proposals.*

Budget and Budget Narrative: The Budget should specify how the planning grant funds will be used for the activities described in the request letter. The Budget Narrative should provide a short narrative for each line item included in the Budget. *The Guide to Budget Preparation, which is provided on the initiative's webpage, includes required formats.* The Endowment recommends working closely with those responsible for accounting procedures and financial policies in the organization to create a budget that aligns with those procedures and policies.

Exempt Status and Charity/Foundation Status Information Form: This form, which is provided on the initiative's webpage, is used to verify the organization's tax status as a qualified recipient of grants from private foundations such as the Endowment. The organization must check a box in Section 3 of the form to reflect the organization's status as a church (including a convention, association or integrated auxiliary of a church), school, publicly supported charity, etc. The organization's status may be located on an Internal Revenue Service exempt status determination letter, as indicated in Section 3 of the form and as described below.

Copy of Internal Revenue Service Exempt Status Determination Letter: Most churches and public charities (including regional judicatories and church networks) that are qualified recipients for grants from private foundations will have received a tax-exempt status determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This letter provides verification of the organization's status as a 501(c)(3) organization and indicates the section of the tax code under which the organization's public charity status has been established. Some regional judicatories or church networks may not have asked for or received such a letter from the IRS. If that is the case, the judicatory or church network should determine whether it is listed in the group exemption ruling for a denomination or other charitable organization. If so, the judicatory or church network should attach evidence that it is covered by the ruling (For example, by sending copies of the directory cover and the page on which the judicatory or church network is listed in the official directory of the denomination or charitable organization.) No grants will be awarded until the proper tax status is confirmed.

Planning Grant Proposal Submission Guidelines and Checklist

Planning grant requests must be submitted **by April 15, 2026**, as a single PDF through the online planning grant submission form on the Faith and AI initiative's webpage. The Endowment anticipates announcing planning grant awards on a rolling basis beginning in March and continuing through April 2026. Complete requests for planning grants must include the following elements in the order listed below.

- ❑ Official Request Letter (one page)
- ❑ Information Form (provided on the initiative's webpage)
- ❑ Budget and Budget Narrative (see Guide to Budget Preparation)
- ❑ Copy of Organization's Current Year Operating Budget
- ❑ Exempt Status and Charity/Foundation Status Information Form (provided on the initiative's webpage)
- ❑ Copy of IRS Exempt Status Determination Letter

Stage Two: Implementation Grant Proposal Guidelines

In the second stage of the Faith and AI Initiative, invited organizations may submit proposals for implementation grants of **up to \$2.5 million each** that may be used for **up to a five-year period** to execute programs designed during the planning stage that advance the aim and objectives of the initiative.

A complete implementation proposal must include the elements described below.

Official Request Letter: This **one-page** letter requesting a grant must be signed by the organization's chief executive officer and the chair of its governing board. The letter should specify the amount requested from the Endowment.

Information Form: This form, which is provided on the initiative's webpage, requests key information about the proposal and identifies the individuals responsible for the proposed program. *Please note that this is the same form that organizations submitted with their planning grant requests. Organizations should review and update the information with appropriate information and contacts for their proposed program and submit the updated form with their implementation proposal.*

Executive Summary: The summary, which should **not exceed one page**, provides a description of the organization, its mission and constituencies, the primary purpose of the proposed program, the program's key activities, and its anticipated outcomes.

Summary Budget: This **one-page** summary of the proposed program's budget should condense budget line items from the detailed Line-Item Budget. *Please reference the Guide to Budget Preparation for more details.*

Proposal Narrative: This narrative, which should **not exceed 10 pages** (excluding the Executive Summary, Summary Budget, Line-Item Budget, Budget Narrative, Program Timetable and other accompanying materials), should address the topics and questions below:

1. Purpose and Rationale:

- › What is the purpose of the proposed program, and how will it advance the initiative's aim and objectives?
- › Why is the organization interested in developing the proposed program?
- › What did the organization learn during the planning stage about the ways that digital technologies and AI applications are shaping the lives of youth and young adults today?
- › What sources of wisdom from Christian traditions are crucial for understanding and supporting human flourishing in the age of digital technologies and AI? What theological and ethical

frameworks will the organization use to design and implement its program? If the organization decides to use the DELTA faith-based ethical framework noted above, how will it draw on or develop it?

- › What Christian practices will help middle school and high school-aged youth and/or young adults navigate challenges of digital technologies and AI and nourish their well-being? Why these practices?
- › What age groups of young people will the proposed program seek to engage and serve (e.g., middle school-aged youth, high school aged-youth, young adults in their twenties)? Why these groups? What did the organization learn through the planning process about the most effective ways to engage these groups?

2. Program Design:

- › What is the proposed program's overall design, and what are its key activities? How will these activities result in a coherent and effective strategy that advances the program's purpose and the initiative's aim and objectives?

What activities will help youth and young adults engage in and learn from the wisdom of Christian traditions about appropriate uses of digital technologies and AI for promoting and sustaining human flourishing?

What activities will encourage and help young people to engage in Christian practices to nourish their well-being and grow in faith?

What activities will reach young people and engage them in the program? What networks or collaborations will support or enhance the program's engagement strategy?

- › Who will lead the proposed program and implement its activities?

3. Outcomes, Performance Indicators and Evaluation Plan:

Outcomes:

- › What are the anticipated outcomes for the proposed program?
- › What are the anticipated outcomes for youth and young adults? For parents, pastors and others who care for youth? For Christian congregations and youth-serving organizations? For the organization? For the organization's wider networks?

Performance Indicators:

- › What specific performance indicators will the organization use to track and measure the program's progress toward its anticipated outcomes described above? Please include the intervals for achieving these outcomes in a timetable.

Note: Outcomes and performance indicators may be quantitative and qualitative in nature. For example, one of the proposed program's outcomes may be that 200 young people would engage in Christian practices that help them spend more time building in-person relationships with peers and less time in virtual and online spaces. An accompanying performance indicator may be that at least 100 young people chose intentionally to spend 10 hours per month engaged in the Christian practice of service and 10 hours less per month online by the grant's third year and this number

increases to 200 by the grant's fifth year. A second example of a program outcome may be that 200 young people will come to understand and practice sabbath in their lives. An accompanying performance indicator may be that 50 percent of young people participating in the program report choosing to participate in worship services as a way to practice Sabbath by the end of the program's third year and this percentage increases to 85 percent by the fifth year. A third example of a program outcome may be that 100 parents in five congregations report through pre- and post-program surveys that they feel better equipped to help their adolescent children use social media well. An accompanying performance indicator may be that 50 percent of parents of adolescents in these congregations report by the end of the program's third year that using a resource created by the program has helped them become more aware of and/or better at regulating their children's social media use and this percentage increases in the fourth and fifth years.

Evaluation Plan:

- › What is the organization's plan to evaluate the proposed program?
- › How and at what intervals will the organization track the program's performance indicators?
- › What qualitative and quantitative methods will the organization use in the evaluation process (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys)?
- › Who is responsible for evaluation?

4. Communication:

- › How will the organization communicate and share insights and resources about the proposed program with its constituencies?
- › With whom will the organization communicate what is learned?
- › What communication tools will the organization employ and how?

5. Sustainability and Continuation:

- › If successful, how does the organization intend to sustain key elements of its proposed program beyond the end of the grant period?
- › How will the organization embed the proposed program into its ongoing operations?
- › How will new sources of funding be cultivated to replace grant dollars? When will such cultivation efforts begin? Will the organization include in its budget for the proposed program funds to support expenses for raising sustaining funds (e.g., development staff expenses, fundraising campaign expenses)? What are these expenses?

6. Organizational Capacity:

- › What is the organization's mission, its relationship to a Christian denomination or tradition and its organizational structure, and who are key staff (especially as related to the proposed program)?
- › What is the organization's annual operating budget and major sources of revenue that support its operating budget?
- › How does the proposed program relate to the organization's current programs and organizational structure?

Program Timetable: This **one-page** timetable should include the proposed program's key activities. This may be submitted in a chart format or narrative description. In the timetable, the organization should identify key activities and milestones for implementation, including evaluation (i.e., when specific performance indicators will be assessed to track progress towards outcomes), communication and sustainability activities. *The timetable is not included in the 12-page limit for the Proposal Narrative.*

Line-Item Budget and Budget Narrative: The detailed **Line-Item Budget** should specify how the implementation grant funds will be used for the activities described in the letter of request. The **Budget Narrative** should provide a short narrative detail for each line item included in the Line-Item Budget. *The Guide to Budget Preparation, which is provided on the initiative's webpage, includes required formats.* The Endowment recommends working closely with those responsible for accounting procedures and financial policies in the organization to create a Line-Item Budget that aligns with those procedures and policies.

Copy of Organization's Current Year Operating Budget: The operating budget submitted with the proposal must be for the organization's current fiscal year at the time of the proposal's submission.

Copy of Organization's Annual Audited Financial Statements: The annual audited financial statements should be for the organization's most recently completed fiscal year. The financial statements should include a balance sheet, income and expense statement, and any footnotes that provide an accurate assessment of the financial condition of the organization. If the organization does not have audited financial statements, it may submit with its proposal reviewed financial statements conducted by a certified public accounting firm.

Letter(s) of Support (if applicable): If the proposed program involves other organizations, the organization may include with its proposal letters of support from leaders of those organizations.

Implementation Grant Proposal Submission Guidelines and Checklist

Implementation grant proposals must be submitted **by August 21, 2026**, through the online proposal submission form on the initiative's webpage. Proposal materials must be combined into a single PDF and organized in the order listed below.

- ☐ Official Request Letter (one page)
- ☐ Information Form (updated with implementation grant information)
- ☐ Executive Summary (not to exceed one page)
- ☐ Summary Budget (one page)
- ☐ Proposal Narrative (not to exceed 10 pages)
- ☐ Program Timetable (one page)
- ☐ Line-Item Budget and Budget Narrative (see Guide to Budget Preparation)
- ☐ Copy of Organization's Current Year Operating Budget
- ☐ Copy of Organization's Annual Audited Financial Statements
- ☐ Letter(s) of Support (if applicable)

Questions may be directed to Chanon Ross at faithandAI@lei.org.