



**Leadership Education at Duke Divinity  
Request for Proposals  
2025 Reflective Leadership Grants  
March 7, 2025**

**Application Opens:** March 7, 2025

**Q&A session 1:** March 21, 2025 (1:00 – 2:00 PM ET)

**Q&A session 2:** April 25, 2025 (12:00 – 1:00 PM ET)

**Application Closes:** May 2, 2025, at 11:59 PM ET

**Award Notification:** July 18, 2025

**Project Timeline:** September 1, 2025 – March 1, 2027

**Grantee Convening:** October 27 - 29, 2025, in Durham, NC. *Applicants are asked to commit to attend the convening. This convening will bring all recipients together for a collaborative learning experience as they begin their balcony time. All reasonable expenses for the retreat will be paid separately from the grant.*

**Final Report Due:** March 31, 2027

## **Invitation**

The Reflective Leadership Grant supports an opportunity for structured reflection. Ideal applicants are lay or clergy leaders of Christian organizations, specifically those organizations that are advancing their mission following the complex opportunities and challenges that emerged and/or intensified throughout the past few years.

While all leaders are encouraged to practice some form of ongoing reflection, this grant aims to support those leaders whose work has made a demonstrable contribution to their organization's mission. These leaders are at a pivotal moment for stepping back and reflecting to assess their ministry (what has been accomplished), evaluate organizational progress (what is changing and what is stable) and chart the next steps in their personal and ministry journey. The Reflective Leadership Grant allows leaders to broaden their perspectives and gain clarity about what needs to happen next in their personal and professional life.

Since our founding in 2008, Leadership Education at Duke Divinity has observed established Christian institutions experimenting with surprising collaborators and alternative expressions of ministry. We also have observed new Christian ministries being created to address challenges in fresh ways. The leaders in these ministry efforts often operate with slim margins of both financial support and available time. By inviting the application for a modest grant of up to \$15,000, we intend to encourage these leaders to consider the questions and issues that should be pursued and how to address the opportunities and challenges in the next phase of ministry at the intersection of their personal and organizational life.

**Leadership Education at Duke Divinity**

1121 W. Chapel Hill St., Suite 200 | Durham, North Carolina 27701 | [leadership.divinity.duke.edu](http://leadership.divinity.duke.edu) | [leadership@div.duke.edu](mailto:leadership@div.duke.edu)

This grant program is for leaders who are ready to design the next chapter in their ministry. It invites leaders to reflect on their journey, their organization's current position and how the two can evolve. Applicants may seek to cultivate new partnerships, expand their networks or reimagine practices and strategies in line with the organization's core mission. Applicants might realize that their work needs to be framed or re-framed to cultivate new supporters and allies. Other applicants might have helped their staff or volunteers in expanding their ministry, but as the leader, they need time and perspective to chart out next steps for an enlarged vision.

A critical element of the application will be articulating why this is a pivotal moment for the leader and the ministry. Applicants must identify the opportunity they seek to explore and how a period of reflection will enhance their ability to lead with greater clarity and purpose.

Some questions to consider: What is the opportunity, and how might a season of structured reflection help the leader gain perspective? What is the vision of the work, and how do practices need to be reimaged to realign with the organization's "why?"

Research suggests that such perspective-taking is an important component of discernment. For example, Harvard professor Ron Heifetz calls such an opportunity "balcony time," which allows a leader to move from the dance floor to the balcony to gain a broader picture of the work, organization, community and trends. This balcony time could take the following forms:

- **Extended leave** or multiple shorter retreats for site visits and exposure to exemplary ministry models
- **Learning experiences** such as attending a conference, event or seminar and reflecting on insights gained
- **Professional coaching or mentorship:** engaging a consultant or coach for focused guidance

We recognize that such balcony time can have costs for the applicant's organization and family, which can be accounted for in the grant proposal.

We welcome applicants who serve in a range of leadership roles, from project director to senior administrator, and who are working in a variety of organizations, including denominations, seminaries, church-related colleges, consultancies, congregations, Christian nonprofits, Christian social enterprises and others. We are particularly interested in supporting leaders whose work contributes to healing and hope in their communities by strengthening congregations, social services, schools and other organizations.

***This grant is not meant to fund academic research or clergy sabbatical. For sabbatical support, please visit [Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs](#).***

Leadership Education plans to award upwards of 30 grants to the organizations representing the applicants who submit the most outstanding applications. In 2024, 50 Reflective Leadership Grants were awarded to institutions to support the applicant's balcony time. [See the winners here.](#)

**About Leadership Education at Duke Divinity**

Established in 2008 by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., [Leadership Education at Duke Divinity](#) designs educational services, develops intellectual resources and facilitates networks of institutions. We aim to create lasting change by strengthening the ecology of Christian institutions that enable U.S. congregations and pastors to flourish. For additional information, please email [leadership@div.duke.edu](mailto:leadership@div.duke.edu).

## Proposal Requirements

A successful proposal will describe the applicant's ministry, assess their ministry (what has been accomplished) and evaluate organizational progress (what is changing and what is stable). The proposal will chart the next steps in their personal and ministry journey, address what the applicant commits not to do during the time of reflection and describe why this is a significant moment for reflection. It will convey a sense of intentional curiosity and direction. This description should be 70% of the application.

The proposed activities should relate to the reason why this is a pivotal moment for reflection within the applicant's vocational journey and in the life of the organization. For example, the applicant might want to attend a conference because of the need to learn from a variety of professions about how to design a new ministry. An applicant might consult with a subject matter expert or visit start-up incubators or college vocation programs because of the needs in the community where the applicant works. The grant funds might also be required to fund basic support, such as childcare, senior care or the organization's day-to-day work.

This grant is not meant to be a sabbatical or to fund academic research. For the 18-month timeframe of the project, the applicant may design a timeline that makes sense for them and their schedule. For example, the applicant could propose:

- **Extended leave:** Taking a focused period away from daily work (e.g., one month or several consecutive weeks) for deep reflection
- **Periodic breaks:** Reserving a day or portion of a day each week or month to step back from daily operations
- **Blended model of the above:** Combining leave, site visits and learning events to maintain consistent reflection throughout the grant period

The best proposals likely will combine several of these elements in a balanced and sensible way. The applicant will articulate what they hope will be different about themselves and/or the work following a season of balcony time.

### Eligibility

The Reflective Leadership Grant program at Leadership Education is a competitive grant program, open to any employee of a faith-based charitable organization. We welcome applicants who serve in a range of leadership roles, from project director to senior administrator, and who are working in a variety of organizations, including denominations, seminaries, church-related colleges, consultancies, congregations, Christian nonprofits, Christian social enterprises and others. We are particularly interested in supporting leaders whose work contributes to healing and hope in their communities by strengthening congregations, social services, schools and other organizations.

We encourage an organization to submit one proposal for balcony time for one leader per year. If, however, an applicant's organization consists of multiple entities, then the applicant may submit one proposal for each entity, but each entity must have its own tax ID number. **If an applicant's organization currently has a Capacity Building Grant from Leadership**

**Education at Duke Divinity, it is currently ineligible to apply for a Reflective Leadership Grant.**

Previous recipients of the Reflective Leadership Grant may apply for a Reflective Leadership Grant every seven years.

The organization is the fiscal agent for the grant; therefore the senior officer of the organization must submit a signed letter of request and support on behalf of the applicant. A letter from the applicant's board of directors or advisors will be acceptable if the applicant is the senior officer. The applicant is unable to submit their own letter of support.

Reflective Leadership Grants are made to an organization and are not portable. If at any point the recipient who intended to benefit from the grant should leave their position with the organization, all grant-related activities and expenditures must cease, any unspent funds returned to Leadership Education and a final financial accounting for all expenditures provided to Leadership Education. Similarly, if an applicant should leave their staff position with the organization after submitting a proposal, the proposal should be withdrawn.

Proposals centered on non-Christian organizations are discouraged, and leaders from non-Christian faith traditions are discouraged from applying.

Any faith-based charitable organizations in the United States are eligible to apply for a Reflective Leadership Grant on behalf of one of their employees. We encourage organizations to submit proposals in which the majority of the organization's work occurs in the United States. We discourage the submission of a proposal focused on leaders not serving in the United States.

The Reflective Leadership Grant program is not intended to be a fellowship program for work toward an academic degree, including the doctor of ministry degree. It is acceptable for some part of the grant activities to involve modest travel and research. However, if plans are strictly dedicated to work involved in the pursuit of a degree, applicants are advised to find support elsewhere.

This grant is not intended for clergy sabbaticals or academic research. Those seeking sabbatical support should apply to the [Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs](#).

Grant funds must be used within 18 months of receiving funding. Funds not used must be returned.

Applicants may request funds to cover the cost of equipment and supplies needed to pursue the proposed activities. Equipment expenses should be no more than 10% of the applicant's proposed budget. The budget line-item description should list the items requested and describe why they are essential. The cost of such items should be appropriate to their significance for the activities and in relation to the overall budget.

Travel costs should be no more than 20% of the applicant's proposed budget. The budget line-item description should list the travel locations and describe why they are essential. The cost of

travel should be appropriate to the travel's significance for the activities and in relation to the overall budget.

Applicants are asked to commit to attending an in-person convening in Durham, North Carolina. This convening will bring all recipients together for a collaborative learning experience as they begin their balcony time. All reasonable expenses for the retreat will be paid separately from the grant.

### **Selection Criteria**

Leadership Education at Duke Divinity will employ an anonymous and impartial team of readers from a variety of disciplines and theological perspectives to review the proposals.

Leadership Education anticipates notifying organizations of funding decisions by July 18, 2025. Applicants not selected in 2024 are eligible to reapply in future years. Previous recipients of the Reflective Leadership Grant must wait seven years from grant completion to reapply.

The Reflective Leadership Grant funds will be available to the selected organizations in September 2025, and the grant period is September 2025 - March 2027. Therefore, if awarded, the applicant may begin their grant activities any time after September 1, 2025.

### **Proposal Submission: Application Questions and Budget Template**

The application will be completed through an online form. All materials should be assembled before submitting the application. The online form does not permit the saving of materials before submitting the application.

Pages 8-10 of this document include all questions and prompts that must be completed when submitting your grant proposal. Feel free to save your own copy of this document and use it as you prepare your application materials. Once you have begun your application form, you will need to complete it, as you will not have the opportunity to save and return to your work later.

You may use [this template](#) to develop a budget for your proposal. You will not submit this worksheet with your application.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Applicant:** The individual who is completing this grant request. The individual must have a fiscal relationship with the organization.
- **Organization:** A tax-exempt, U.S. faith-based charitable organization [501(c)(3)] that will receive, administer and report on the use of grant funds.
- **Christian organization:** An organization that has explicit Christian faith commitments or is committed to working alongside Christian communities in a way that furthers the mission of local congregations.
- **Ministry:** The specific work the applicant leads as part of the organization. This could be a program, department or other division of the faith-based charitable organization.
- **Reflective leadership:** The emphasis here is on "leadership." The applicant continues in a posture of leadership throughout the work of the grant, but the kind of leadership becomes nuanced as they take their balcony time and engage in the reflective work

necessary to determine the next steps for the work and the organization. This is different from letting one's mind relax and wander on a vacation. Reflective leadership time is different from a sabbatical or a family vacation.

- **Pivot:** In the life of an organization, there are seasons of change when a new direction is required. New opportunities or challenges arise and a different course is needed. Moving forward may require a pivot. This grant provides an opportunity to reflect on the work, the mission and what success looks like as the applicant approaches a pivot. It involves taking stock of the people and organizations involved and weighing the options of how to strategically move forward.
- **Balcony time:** A metaphor that describes the activities the applicant is planning to use for the Reflective Leadership Grant. The activities include all of the elements that require funding.

### **Final Reports and Evaluation**

Final narrative and financial reports will be due no later than March 31, 2027. The narrative report should describe the activities engaged, the people with whom the applicant interacted, reflections on what the applicant learned and the applicant's next steps. The financial report should reflect a full and transparent accounting of grant expenditures.

Final report guidelines can be found on pages 11-12.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

Find answers to specific questions regarding the Reflective Leadership Grant [here](#).

## **Application Sections**

### **Section One: Application Form**

- Applicant name, email and mailing address, phone number
- Applicant job title and organization
- Applicant gender, race
- Applicant denomination (if applicable)
- Are you enrolled in a degree program?
  - If so, at what institution? What is the degree? When is the expected graduation date?
- The name of the ministry that the applicant leads
- The name of the organization that will receive the grant
- The name, email and mailing address for the organization's senior officer providing the letter of institutional support
- Name and email of treasurer or institutional representative who will be fiscally responsible for receiving and dispersing the funds
- Postal address of organization
- Denominational affiliation of organization (if any)
- How did you learn about the Reflective Leadership Grant?
- Grant proposal title
- Time period for the grant activities (must end by March 1, 2027)
- A summary of no more than five sentences identifying the pivot point at which the applicant finds themselves and how time for study and reflection will enable them to develop a faithful response
- Have you received financial or time-away support for this type of reflection in the past? If so, please describe the source, timing and results of such reflection. For example, have you received a Louisville Institute Pastoral Study Project Grant or Lilly Endowment National Clergy Renewal Grant? Has your institution provided an extended study leave? How is this grant proposal similar to and distinct from previously funded activities?
- Does your organization currently have a grant from Leadership Education at Duke Divinity?
- Are you available to attend a retreat in Durham, North Carolina from October 27-29, 2025, if the grant application is accepted? (Yes/No) *Applicants are asked to commit to attend the convening. All reasonable expenses for the retreat will be paid separately from the grant.*

### **Section Two: Application Questions**

As part of the submission process, the applicant will be asked to upload a document that conforms to the following instructions and responds to the questions below. The responses to these questions are the foundation of the argument about why the applicant would benefit from this grant at this time.

***Your document must use 12-point Times New Roman font and be single-spaced. Note that each narrative question has a word limit.***



Question 1: Who is the applicant? Please describe and include timeframes for the applicant's education and work history, including schools attended, ministries or programs led and jobs held. Is there something about the applicant's background that makes their application stand out? (1,000-word limit)

Question 2: Describe the applicant's work and major responsibilities. Whom does it serve? What is its purpose? What is the impact of the work on the applicant's community at present? How is that work measured? What is the mission of the organization, and how is the applicant's work an extension of that mission? How do you know your organization is ready for your pivot? (1,500-word limit)

Question 3: Why is this the right moment to step back and reflect? What questions are on the applicant's mind that would be ripe to pursue? What is the applicant curious about concerning their ministry vocation? What does the applicant hope will be different about themselves and/or the work as a result of a season of reflection? Considering what a leader is doing in a season of balcony time is as important as what they commit not to do. What are the activities the applicant believes they need to stop doing during this balcony time? (1,500-word limit)

### **Section Three: Activities**

As part of the submission process, the applicant will be asked to upload a document that conforms to the following instructions.

***Your document must use 12-point Times New Roman font and be single-spaced.***

What activities is the applicant proposing, and how would these help the applicant answer the questions they intend to pursue? To answer these questions, provide a brief plan (1,000 words) that describes the logistics of the balcony time, including a clear description of each activity and how the activity furthers the applicant's goals. Please provide specific dates and locations of travel. Some of the many activities that applicants might propose include:

- Consulting a subject matter expert (please include indications about the relevance of this expert's work)
- Attending an event or conference, particularly events from different fields of inquiry
- Traveling to observe others doing similar work (please indicate who will be visited and why)
- Taking an extended period fully away from work
- Setting aside designated weekly or monthly days (or partial days) off
- Creating intermittent blocks of time away from work to actively reflect on next steps
- Engaging a coach or spiritual director to actively reflect on trends and patterns in the work
- Paying a portion of the cost of a replacement in the organization
- Providing childcare or senior care so the applicant can be away from home

### **Section Four: Budget**

Leadership Education grant proposal budgets must follow the following guidelines. Proposal budgets that do not follow these guidelines will not be considered.

1. Proposal budgets must be submitted using the online form. A [worksheet](#) has been provided to you to develop the budget, but is not required for submission.
2. Proposal budgets must be submitted using the provided expense categories. Expenses that do not fit into the established categories should be detailed in the “Other” category.
3. Proposal budgets should not include additional income sources or expenses that will be funded by other funding sources.
4. Proposal budgets must total the amount indicated on the worksheet.

**Budget categories:**

1. **Personnel expenses** - The Reflective Leadership Grant budget may include salary expenses for time associated with “balcony time” activities.
2. **Contractor expenses** - All contractors’ honoraria must be accounted for in the Reflective Leadership Grant budgets.
3. **Conference and event registration costs** - Conference and event fees for team members are allowable expenses. Tuition for degree programs is not allowed.
4. **Travel accommodation and meals** – Travel expenses may not total more than 20% of the budget. Please list your travel locations and the rationale for them.
5. **Books and other materials**
6. **Equipment** - Equipment expenses may not total more than 10% of the budget. Please list all equipment that will be purchased and the rationale for the items.
7. **Other** - All additional expenses that do not fit into the above categories. Please detail these expenses in the line-item description.

**Section Five: Letter of Institutional Support**

Provide a letter of institutional support from the senior officer of the organization requesting the funds on behalf of the applicant. If you are the CEO/senior officer of your organization, a letter from your board of directors or advisors will be acceptable if you are the senior officer. You are unable to submit your own letter of support.

The letter must be signed (with a handwritten signature), dated and on the organization’s letterhead. Upload your Letter of Institutional Support (Word or PDF) via the online application form.

Please address your letter to: Mycal Brickhouse, Director of Programs and Grants, Leadership Education at Duke Divinity, 1121 W. Chapel Hill St., Suite 200, Durham, NC 27701.

## Final Report and Evaluation Guidelines

Please submit your report by March 31, 2027, via the online form that will be shared with you. All materials should be assembled before submitting a final report. The online form does not permit the saving of materials before submitting the application.

We look forward to reading about your balcony time and invite you to be honest and forthright in your answers. We are not looking for a collection of success stories, but rather an arc of what worked and what did not in your reflective leadership journey.

### Section One: Project summary questions

- Name of the grant recipient, grant recipient's current job title and organization that is submitting the report
- Titles and names of those central to your Reflective Leadership Grant
- A paragraph (4-5 sentences) summarizing what you learned from your balcony time
- Amount of funds spent in each category (see Section Three for budget categories)

### Section Two: Narrative questions

*Please answer the following questions in a separate document (Word or PDF), responding to each of the 11 questions individually and using 12-point Times New Roman font. You will upload your document via the online form. Note the word limit for each question and document it at the end of each question.*

Activities:

1. What balcony time activities did you complete? (Please list all activities and briefly describe each one.) How are these activities similar to and different from what you proposed? (500-word limit)
2. In what ways did your balcony time involve unexpected collaborations? Who were the unexpected collaborators? (500-word limit)
3. If your work has changed over the period of this grant, please describe the changes in responsibilities, title and/or scope of work. (500-word limit)
4. What one activity engaged in this grant will you likely repeat? Why? (250-word limit)
5. How has the balcony time informed the pivot you articulated in your grant proposal? (250-word limit)

Project Reflection:

1. What did you learn about leadership through this process? How has your balcony time informed or changed how you lead in your context? (500-word limit)
2. What new questions are raised for future reflection and action? What follow-up opportunities does your balcony time present? (500-word limit)
3. How has your balcony time impacted your institution's habits and practices of leadership development? (500-word limit)

4. What surprised you in this process? (500-word limit)
5. What was the greatest challenge or obstacle in this process? For you? For your organization? (1,000-word limit)
6. What story — an actual story with names, places, an event, a learning — are you most excited to tell from this experience? (1,000-word limit)

**Section Three: Budget.**

*This is to be submitted via the online form.*

Using the financial report supplied to you by Leadership Education at the time of the grant award, provide a comparison of the approved grant budget vs. actual expenditures for each budgeted category. Please remember that funds not expended for purposes approved in the budget by March 1, 2027, need to be returned to Duke University with the final report. Please include “Leadership Education/Reflective Leadership Grant” in the notation line of the check.