

Lilly Endowment initiative to offer grant funding to ATS schools

BY *MARISSA DECHANT*

Lilly Endowment Inc. announced that it will make available \$87.5 million in grant funding to ATS-accredited schools this year. The endowment recently launched its Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative, which aims to enhance ATS schools' effectiveness and long-term sustainability by addressing key challenges and taking advantage of opportunities in order to "strengthen and sustain their capacities to prepare and support pastoral leaders for Christian churches—primarily ordained pastoral leaders and secondarily congregational lay ministers." All ATS schools are encouraged to apply.

The three-phase initiative seeks to aid ATS schools in their efforts to: explore emerging challenges and opportunities facing their institutions and the Christian congregations they serve; gain clarity about their missions in relation to the leadership needs of their constituent churches; assess the effectiveness of their educational strategies and financial operations for preparing and supporting pastors and congregational lay ministers; and design and implement plans to launch new and/or strengthen current projects to address their main challenges and opportunities and to make their institutions more educationally effective and financially viable for the continued preparation and support of pastors and congregational lay ministers into the future.

Phase one

In a noncompetitive first phase, eligible schools are invited to submit a letter requesting a grant of up to \$50,000 for institutional assessment and strategic

planning activities for the purposes stated in the request for proposals.

Application materials are due by either February 15, March 1, or March 15, 2021.

Phase two

In a competitive second phase, eligible schools may apply for a grant of up to

\$1 million to implement a long-term plan to strengthen their educational and financial capacities to prepare and support pastors and congregational lay ministers. Up to 50 schools may receive grants. Proposals for implementation are due by August 2, 2021.

Phase three

In a competitive third phase, eligible schools may apply for a grant of up to \$5 million to implement a collaborative endeavor that would: strengthen the educational and financial capacities of the collaborating institutions to prepare and support pastors and congregational lay ministers in the long term; and offer a compelling and sustainable strategy or model of theological education that, if successful, could be adopted by other schools. Schools may submit a concept paper for a large-scale project, and selected schools will be invited to develop their concepts. The endowment has allocated \$25 million for this phase. Concept papers are due by November 1, 2021.

Assessment and planning activities funded by phase one grants may begin as soon as schools are notified of grant awards, and schools have returned signed grant



agreements to the Lilly Endowment. The grant periods will be provided in the grant agreements. The endowment anticipates that schools will carry out their phase one planning and assessment activities in 2021.

For phase two, schools may request grant periods of up to five years beginning in January 2022 or thereafter. For phase three, schools may request grant periods of up to five years beginning June 2022 or thereafter.

Schools may apply for grants in all three phases, or they may choose to apply for funding only in specific phases. Participation in phase one is not a requirement to submit a proposal in phase two or a concept paper in phase three.

While not mandatory, schools may collaborate in one or more phases of the initiative. If collaborating in phase

one and/or phase two, each school may apply for its own assessment grant and should describe in its application the purpose of the joint activities and how they would be conducted. In phase three, one school may submit a concept paper and serve as the lead grantee for a collaborative project, and the concept paper should identify the other collaborating schools. The phase three concept paper should describe clearly the proposed joint activities and how the funds would be managed and distributed among the collaborating schools.

Details about applying for funding are available in the initiative's [request for proposals](#). A list of [frequently asked questions](#) is available on the Lilly Endowment website.



Marissa Dechant is Executive Assistant at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.