



Louisville Institute 2026 Dissertation Fellowship Application Guide

The Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship offers US\$35,000 grants to **support the final year of dissertation writing for Ph.D. or Th.D. students** whose research focuses on Christian faith and life, the practice of ministry, religious trends and movements, Christian and other faith-based institutions, and religion and social issues.

FELLOWSHIP DETAILS

Application Due Date:

February 1, 2026
(11:59 p.m. ET)

Dissertation Fellowship Amount:

US\$35,000

Fellowship Timeline:

Fall 2026 — Fall 2027
(applicants should expect to complete their dissertations in 2027)

Awards Announced:

May 2026

Winter Seminar:

January 2027



QUESTIONS? Please email fellowships@louisville-institute.org.

APPLY ONLINE: WWW.LOUISVILLE-INSTITUTE.ORG
APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1, 2026



WHAT ARE DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIPS?

The Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship offers US\$35,000 grants to support the final year of dissertation writing for Ph.D. or Th.D. students whose research focuses on Christian faith and life, the practice of ministry, religious trends and movements, Christian and other faith-based institutions, and religion and social issues. Dissertation projects may emerge from diverse fields such as history, systematic and practical theology, social sciences, ethics, biblical studies, etc., or may be interdisciplinary in nature. Of particular interest to the Louisville Institute are projects with the potential to bridge church and academy, and to generate new knowledge that enriches the life of the church in North America. Students applying in 2026 should expect to complete their dissertations during the 2027 calendar year.

Dissertation Fellows also attend Winter Seminar, a three-day gathering in Louisville, KY, in which award recipients from three different Louisville Institute programs gather to share their projects and engage in valuable collaboration together. Winter Seminar for this grant cycle will take place January 2027, and all related expenses for participants are paid by the Louisville Institute. Attending this event is a requirement of receiving a Dissertation Fellowship.



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WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIP?

Eligible Applicants:

- are candidates for a Ph.D. or Th.D. degree at an accredited graduate school in the United States or Canada. D.Min. students and others in practical degrees are not eligible for this fellowship.
- must reside in the United States or Canada, and be U.S. or Canadian citizens or international students with appropriate student visas to study in North America. Students enrolled in North American doctoral programs but living outside of the United States and Canada are not eligible.
- must complete all pre-dissertation requirements, including approval of the dissertation proposal, and be “all but dissertation” by February 1, 2026.
- Should expect to complete and defend the dissertation before December 31, 2027.

LI Doctoral Fellows are welcome to apply for the Dissertation Fellowship program. However, if you have previously received and declined an LI Dissertation Fellowship, you are not eligible to apply again.

Additional eligibility requirements:

- Individuals may only apply for one LI grant or fellowship between June 1, 2025, and May 31, 2026.
- Any previous grants from the Louisville Institute must be completed and final reports submitted before applying for another LI fellowship or grant.
- Members of the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary staff, faculty, Board of Trustees, or student body or their immediate family members (parents, spouses, or children) are ineligible for Louisville Institute grants or fellowships. Members of the Louisville Institute Advisory Board and their immediate family members are also ineligible.
- Louisville Institute grantees may not simultaneously hold two individual grants or fellowships from Lilly Endowment-funded organizations that together total more than US\$55,000. Please contact us if you have questions about this stipulation: fellowships@louisville-institute.org.



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WHAT IS WINTER SEMINAR?

A significant benefit of the Dissertation Fellowship is participation in Winter Seminar, a three-day gathering in Louisville, KY, in which award recipients from three different Louisville Institute programs gather to share their projects and engage in valuable collaboration together. Winter Seminar for this fellowship cycle will take place January 2027, and all related expenses for participants are paid by the Louisville Institute. *Attendance at this event is required for all Dissertation Fellows.*



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WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW BEFORE I APPLY?

The intent of the LI Dissertation Fellowship is to help free students from other commitments in order to finish their dissertations. For this reason, Dissertation Fellows are required to limit their outside employment to no more than 20 hours a week unless they ask for and receive prior approval from the Louisville Institute (such conversations take place when awards are granted).

Please note that as a Louisville Institute grantee or fellow you may not simultaneously hold two grants that total more than \$55,000 from Lilly Endowment-funded organizations, nor can you accept a Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship and another comparable dissertation completion grant at the same time (such as The Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, or fellowships from the Hispanic Theological Initiative or the Forum for Theological Exploration). This does not preclude you from applying for grants from other institutions; if you are awarded a Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship and grants from other sources we will discuss options with you, including the possibility of being an Honorary Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellow. Additionally, the Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship is intended to supplement — not to replace — financial support you would otherwise receive from your doctoral institution during the period of the Louisville Institute grant. If your doctoral institution chooses to lessen or discontinue your financial support because you receive a Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship, let them know that the Louisville Institute will withdraw the fellowship award.

Because the Louisville Institute is housed at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, members of the seminary's Board, staff, or student body or their immediate family members (parents, spouse, or children) are not eligible for LI grants or fellowships.



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HOW DO I APPLY?

- Specific application requirements are described starting on [page 9](#).
- All applications are submitted online through our application portal. Click the APPLY button and select Dissertation Fellowship to begin your application.
- Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET February 1, 2026.
- Recommendation letters are due from your recommenders February 8, 2026.

WHAT IS THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIPS?

- The Louisville Institute appoints a selection committee to review proposals and award Dissertation Fellowships. Selection takes place about 8 weeks after the application due date.
- We typically receive 100 or more eligible applications for the Dissertation Fellowship. In 2026, we expect to award 10 fellowships.
- All applicants will be notified by email as soon as possible following the selection process. Awards will be announced publicly in May 2026.
- Fellowship funds are dispersed in two equal payments: in September of the award year (2026), and January the following year (2027).



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WHAT MAKES A STRONG APPLICATION?

- Make sure you meet the eligibility requirements before submitting an application, and complete all pre-dissertation portions of your doctoral program by February 1, 2026.
- Read the application materials and follow the instructions carefully. The Dissertation Fellowship is one of our most competitive programs, so small things, like not providing materials as requested, can make a difference in the selection process.
- A dissertation prospectus should be written specifically for this application, following the guidelines and prompts provided. The most competitive projects are connected to or important for the North American church, and bridge the church and the academy.
- We strongly encourage you to share your proposal with trusted advisors and colleagues – ideally those who will write your recommendation letters – to receive feedback and suggestions prior to submitting your application.
- Please don't hesitate to ask questions as you go along! Email fellowships@louisville-institute.org.



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PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

- 1** Read through all the application materials in this guide carefully.
- 2** Prepare your application materials early so that you can get feedback on your essay, request a copy of your transcript, and ask for recommendation letters.
- 3** Create an online profile on our [application portal](#). You will be asked to provide your name, contact information, and other information about yourself. If you have previously applied for a Louisville Institute program, make sure to update your contact information.
- 4** Once you have created your profile, **click the “Apply” button and select “Dissertation Fellowship”** to begin entering the elements of your application.
- 5** **Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET February 1, 2026.** We recommend that you put together the application elements in time to share them with advisors or colleagues for feedback before submitting them. Please do your best to provide clear, refined, and edited documents, noting which elements should be submitted as PDFs.
- 6** **Recommendation letters are due from the recommenders February 8, 2026.** In the application portal you will be asked to provide contact information for your recommenders — name, email address, and phone number — and we will send them a link to upload their letters.



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APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Dissertation Fellowship applications require the following six elements. After you have created your online profile, you will be prompted to provide the following:

- 1 General information about your dissertation progress to date, including:**
 - The school where you are a doctoral student
 - The address where you will be living during the 2026-2027 academic year
 - Your academic discipline/field
 - Title of your proposed dissertation
 - Project core question: In a few sentences, describe the heart of your dissertation — in the form of a question you want to explore — and why the project is important to your community, your field, and/or North American Christianity. (Limit 500 characters/about 100 words.)
 - Dissertation summary/abstract: Briefly describe your dissertation, its claims, and its significance. (Limit 2000 characters, about 200 words.)
 - Project Snapshot: In one sentence, offer an intriguing, quotable “snapshot” of your project (for use on our website and in publicity materials).
 - Keyword tags of 3-5 words to describe your dissertation
 - Doctoral progress: the dates you completed your coursework, comprehensive or qualifying exams, and received approval of your dissertation proposal, which must be completed by February 1, 2026, and your anticipated dissertation defense date.
 - Other graduate degrees completed (Institution, degree & completion date)
 - Additional support: List other grants or fellowships you’ve received or for which you intend to apply for your final year. (This information is simply for our reference as we work with other funding institutions and partners.)
 - Vocational plans: Briefly describe what you hope to do after you complete your dissertation, and how you envision your dissertation and vocational trajectory contributing to North American Christianity and/or bridging church and academy. (Limit 2000 characters/about 200 words.)

Continued on next page



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APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Dissertation Fellowship applications require the following elements. After you have created your online profile, you will be prompted to provide the following:

- 2 Dissertation prospectus:** Compose a dissertation prospectus of no more than 1500 words (5–7 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) in which you describe your dissertation, summarize its argument and your methods and discoveries thus far, making sure to discuss its contribution to North American Christianity. In addition to the scholarly content of your dissertation, describe why the project matters to you and why you are passionate about carrying out research on this topic. We recognize that you may be in the early stages of writing; the strongest applications reflect vision and purpose even in the midst of an emerging project. We want to know not just the *what* and *how* of your project, but the *why*. Put your name on each page, number the pages, and upload the document as a PDF.
- 3 Selective bibliography:** Compile a carefully curated bibliography (2–3 pages maximum, double-spaced) that identifies the primary resources you will study, review, or consult in relation to your project. A research bibliography often consists of relevant publications, but may also include media, organizations, institutions, conference materials, interviews, etc., depending on the nature of your project. Use a citation style appropriate to your field of study. Put your name on each page, number the pages, and upload the document as a PDF.
- 4 Doctoral transcript:** One transcript (unofficial or official) from your doctoral program to date must be uploaded in the application portal. Transcripts are due with the application, so make sure to request them in advance so they are received in time.



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APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- 5 Curriculum vitae or resume:** Provide a PDF of your CV or resume (no more than four pages) including but not limited to:
- Institutions of higher education you've attended and degrees earned, including dates, starting with the most recent
 - Teaching and/or employment experience, starting with the most recent
 - Major academic honors you've received
 - Titles and citations of your publications, starting with the most recent
 - Other relevant experience that will help the selection committee get to know you, such as church leadership, guild membership, volunteer service, etc.
- 6 Two letters of recommendation, due from recommenders on February 8, 2026.** In the online application portal, you will be asked to provide contact information (name, email address, and phone number) for your recommenders, and they will be sent a link by email through which they can upload letters. As soon as you submit contact information, your recommender will automatically receive that email. Make sure to contact your recommenders in advance to explain the fellowship and to share your project proposal.
- **Dissertation advisor letter of recommendation:** Your first letter of recommendation should come from your dissertation advisor who will be asked to assess your doctoral work overall, your dissertation significance and progress to date, and your vocational promise as a teacher and scholar. The recommender should confirm your anticipated doctoral completion date.
 - **Second letter of recommendation:** Your second letter of recommendation should come from an academic mentor or colleague (preferably an experienced or senior scholar) who can speak to your scholarly promise and assess the quality of your doctoral work and research. In addition, this recommender will be asked to comment on your personal qualities and commitments, including engagement with faith communities, if applicable.

We will notify you via email when we receive the letters from your recommenders.



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COMPLETING THE APPLICATION

All elements of the application, including transcripts, must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. ET on February 1, 2026, except the recommendation letters, which are due by February 8, 2026. You can edit all portions of your application until the deadline, after which changes cannot be made. Late applications will not be accepted.

In the week after the application deadline, LI staff will process the applications to prepare for the selection committee. We will follow up with you if your application is incomplete. We will also send you confirmation when we receive your letters of recommendation, and will email you when your application is complete.

If you have questions or encounter problems with the application, email fellowships@louisville-institute.org.



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WHO WE ARE

Funded by the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment, Inc., the [Louisville Institute](#) bridges Church and academy by awarding grants and fellowships to those who lead and study North American religious institutions, practices, and movements, and thereby promoting scholarship that strengthens Church, academy, and society, and ultimately contributes to the flourishing of the Church. To find out more:

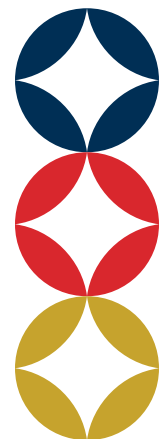
[Grants](#)

[Fellowships](#)

The Institute's [Advisory Board](#) shapes mission and direction, helps review and approve grant and fellowship proposals, and evaluates initiatives and programs. Our [staff](#) guides the Institute's work on a daily basis from our offices on the campus of [Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary](#).



The [Religion Division of Lilly Endowment](#) names as a primary aim of its grantmaking "to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians in the United States, primarily by seeking out and supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations and strengthen the pastoral and lay leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment also seeks to improve public understanding of diverse religious traditions by supporting fair and accurate portrayals of the role religion plays in the United States and across the globe."



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WHO WE ARE

2026-2028 PRIORITIES

The Louisville Institute supports cutting-edge and visionary research that is significant to the North American church in all its diversity and richness. As the academy and the Christian church imagine the future at the quarter mark of the 21st century, the Louisville Institute seeks to contribute in particular ways to that future, specifically by:

- **Cultivating repair** through projects and ideas that address social injustice, trauma and healing, historical harms, restoration and reconciliation, relationships of trust, and interdependence and interconnectedness.
- **Building collaborative learning communities** that cultivate relational, supportive, and non-competitive research communities, the participatory inclusion of unheard or underrepresented voices, and gatherings of pastors and scholars for mutual learning and collaboration that strengthens and enriches wisdom and discovery.
- **Supporting purposeful risk-taking** that asks questions in new ways, brings together unconventional ideas or concepts, shows courage and ingenuity in the face of an unknown future, and combines grounded thinking with strategic purpose and lively imagination.

For more information about the Louisville Institute, contact us:

1044 Alta Vista Road
Louisville, KY 40205
www.louisville-institute.org
502.992.5432
info@louisville-institute.org



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