

THE VIDDA FOUNDATION
PROPOSAL COVER SHEET
2026

Date of report: April 6, 2026

Name of organization: **The School of General Studies of Columbia University in the City of New York**

Purpose of grant: Scholarships for GS students

Address of the organization: 612 Lewisohn Hall, 2970 Broadway, New York, New York 10027

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Executive director: Professor Lisa Rosen-Metsch, Dean E-mail: lm2892@columbia.edu

Contact person and title (if not executive director): Glenn Novarr, Senior Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, gn2206@columbia.edu; Debbie Rosenberg Bush, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, drb2163@columbia.edu

Is your organization an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit? YES

Grant request: \$65,000 (project support)

Total organizational budget: \$145.7 million

Dates covered by this budget: July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

Total project budget: \$46.2 million (total financial aid budget)

Dates covered by project budget: July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

I. PROPOSAL SUMMARY: one-half page, maximum

Please summarize in a short paragraph the purpose of your agency. Briefly explain why your agency is requesting this grant, what outcomes you hope to achieve, and how you will spend the funds if a grant is made.

The Columbia School of General Studies (GS) is the only Ivy League college specifically dedicated to offering a traditional liberal arts education to “nontraditional” students. For this reason, we have become the destination of choice for academically gifted people who have had to struggle in life before making their way into the four-year college classroom.

We offer our exceptional students full integration into the University’s intellectual culture. GS students take the same courses, at the same times, and with the same professors, as their traditionally aged counterparts. They benefit from all of the other advantages open to Columbia undergraduates, whether that means attending advanced seminars in the sciences and humanities; assisting faculty with library research; or mastering laboratory techniques in state-of-the-art facilities.

Our students also benefit from the full array of support that GS provides. Our tutoring, advising, group workshops, and social gatherings are all tailored to the needs of nontraditional students.

With the Foundation’s help, we propose to continue the successful Vidda Foundation Scholarship Program. This Program allows us to choose five outstanding GS students – all people of limited means who are in a position to gain, in an immediate and practical sense, from the award – to be Vidda Scholars each year. Worth \$13,000 per student, the Vidda Scholarship will allow next year’s recipients to borrow less, to put in longer hours at the library, and to plan for the future with fewer material anxieties.

II. NARRATIVE—Five pages, maximum.

A. Background—*Describe the work of your agency, addressing each of the following:*

1. A brief description of its history and mission.

GS traces its origins back to 1905, when Columbia founded its first public outreach program, known as University Extension. The goal of Extension was to attract working people to the Columbia campus, where they could study such traditional subjects as languages, philosophy, and mathematics, as well as more modern fields such as mechanical engineering, industrial chemistry, and studio art.

The middle of the last century was a time of radical change for the Extension program. With WWII coming to a close, thousands of military veterans had set their sights on Columbia. Though only in their mid-twenties, they had seen the world and had witnessed unprecedented devastation, but they could not enter the Columbia College program for high school graduates

without overwhelming it. The University directed them to Extension, and, in 1947, reimagined Extension as the School of General Studies.

Soon GS began to assume its present shape. It narrowed its focus to students pursuing a bachelor's degree, became selective in its admissions, and imposed distribution and major requirements. In all these ways, it drew closer to the pattern set by the other colleges at Columbia. Yet it kept its special character by staying true to its core constituency: talented individuals who hoped to obtain a traditional undergraduate education, yet who had passed the normative 18-to-22 age window for pursuing a college degree.

Today, GS is the nation's preeminent destination for nontraditional students. We continue to offer these courageous individuals the finest possible liberal arts education, while giving them the support they need to thrive in Columbia's demanding environment.

2. The need or problem that your organization works to address, and the population that your agency serves, including geographic location, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and language.

Where can you pursue a college education if you yearn for a traditional liberal arts program even though you are well over 22 years old? Where can you find an institution that, notwithstanding your age, challenges you to think broadly and deeply and brings you into contact with the finest minds in your discipline?

These are questions faced by thousands of talented and ambitious students in this country every year. Immigrants, parents, veterans, community college graduates, shift-workers, artists, refugees, and other motivated individuals often want the best possible education, but have surprisingly few options. We serve them by offering a unique bachelor's degree program that marries rigor and flexibility, accommodation and respect.

We ask our applicants to prove that at least a year has gone by since they finished high school. Many, however, have been out of school for much longer periods. While the average age is 27, the age range of GS students is 19 to 70.

As a result of our age-blind policy, we are home to the Ivy League's most diverse population of students. Among our sister institutions, we have the largest contingent of veterans (25% of our students), Pell recipients (44%), first-generation students (34%), and community college transfer students (47%). Students with disabilities form a full quarter of our student body. All of these students find a warm welcome and abundant companionship at GS.

3. Current programs and accomplishments. Please emphasize the achievements of the recent past.

Columbia GS is benefitting from a series of exciting new initiatives and accomplishments:

- We inaugurated a new thematic approach to our student programming, emphasizing the theme of "Curiosity, Kindness, and Community." The aim here is to offer a more cohesive experience for students by explicating these three values and inviting students to

co-construct their meaning as stewards of a shared learning environment. We introduced the theme during Orientation Week and have been reinforcing it throughout the year. We choose faculty speakers to speak to the value of curiosity and discuss readings on social value formation, social contracts, and differing definitions of kindness. We are offering new, mandatory workshops for students: the first concerning classroom norms, and the importance of embarking on classroom debates with curiosity and kindness; and the second focusing on creating a climate of inclusivity and civility with the Columbia GS community.

- This past year we welcomed our first cohort of five NYC Scholars, from Borough of Manhattan Community College. The program builds on our long history of welcoming community college students from across the City and the nation; we are, indeed, the one Ivy League college that recruits primarily at the community college level. The Scholars are admitted to Columbia GS while still enrolled in their first institution; the program helps them to make a seamless transition to university-level studies, with dedicated academic and financial aid advising and information sessions.
- GS students carried off numerous prizes in intramural, national, and international fellowship competitions. Thus far in the academic year 2025-26, we have a Gates-Cambridge and a Lafayette Fellowship winner. We have eight Fulbright, one Truman, and one Beinecke finalist still waiting to find out if they have won. Four GS students are Social Impact Fellows with Columbia World Projects, six are Fellows of the Institute of Global Politics, and eight are Fellows of the Salzman Institute of War and Peace Studies. We have a record-breaking six recipients of the Women's Forum Education Fund.

4. Number of paid full-time staff; number of paid part-time staff; number of volunteers.

GS has 94 full-time paid staff members. While we do not rely on volunteers to do the work of the college, we do encourage our dedicated corps of alumni to volunteer their time, both to network with current students and to help run alumni events throughout the country and the world. Many scores of alumni contribute in this way over the course of the year.

5. Your organization's relationships — both formal and informal — with other organizations working to meet the same needs or providing similar services.

GS is like our sister colleges in the Ivy League in that we offer a rigorous, traditional liberal arts curriculum; but we are unlike them in that we actively recruit nontraditional students of every age and from every social background. We thus occupy a unique place in the American educational landscape. Operating proudly within the framework of Columbia University, which prizes academic excellence above all things, we create a supportive ethos for individuals from every walk of life as they pursue their personal goals.

We work closely with other educational institutions to ensure that non-traditional learners know about their varied college options and to inform those with a high level of academic motivation about the opportunity we offer to earn a bachelor's degree at Columbia. Our recruitment staff thus regularly visits community colleges, military bases, and corporate recruiting fairs throughout the U.S. We continue to build strong ties with New York's community colleges, as

we are especially proud of our record of providing an Ivy League education to local students from under-resourced communities.

B. Funding Request—*Please describe the program for which you seek funding.*

If your request is for a specific project, please explain the project including:

- *A statement of its primary purpose and the need or problem that you are seeking to address*
- *The population that you plan to serve and how this population will benefit from the project.*
- *Strategies that you will employ to implement your project.*
- *The proposed staffing pattern for the project, and the names and titles of the individuals who will direct the project.*
- *Anticipated length of the project.*
- *How the project contributes to your organization's overall mission.*

We seek a renewed grant from The Vidda Foundation of \$65,000 for FY 2026-27. As in the past, we will use the grant to fund the Vidda Foundation Scholarship, which we will award to five GS students who plainly deserve the opportunity to study at Columbia in terms of ability and commitment but who cannot pay for the opportunity out of their personal resources.

The Scholarship will help the chosen students by partially defraying the cost of attendance over the entire academic year.

For 2025-26, tuition for undergraduates at Columbia is \$2,258 per credit, or \$67,740 for a 30-credit academic load – and this excludes such unavoidable expenses as books, housing, travel, and activity fees. These figures are certain to rise next year.

Like other GS students, the Vidda Scholars struggle with the price of a Columbia education because, being older than typical undergraduates, they are less likely to be helped by their parents than traditionally aged students. Of the GS population that files the Free Application for Federal Financial Aid, or FAFSA, close to 90% are independent of their families, and 10% are supporting dependents of their own. Another indication of the financial burden on our students is that they are graduating with an average debt of \$80,000.

As members of the GS academic community, the Vidda Scholars will enjoy all of the services we provide to ensure that they are progressing with their coursework according to schedule and that they are taking full advantage of the many enrichment and extracurricular opportunities open to Columbia students. They will benefit from regular visits with their academic deans, as well as from the support and guidance of faculty mentors, the financial aid support team, and fellowship advisers.

GS Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers and our Director of Educational Financing, Daniel Rodriguez, will direct the Vidda Scholarship selection process and the disbursement of funds to the chosen students. Marlyn Delva, our Dean of Students, and Caroline Marvin, our Dean of Academic Affairs, will coordinate all academic and support services for the Scholars.

As important as the Vidda Foundation Scholarship is to the student recipients, it is equally important to GS as an institution. Our mission is to serve as the “people’s college” in the Ivy League, the one place where anyone who can do the work is welcome to attend, regardless of his/her/their age, social background, or ability to pay. The Vidda Foundation allows us to put this mission into practice. Thanks to the Foundation’s loyal philanthropy over the past quarter-century, we have been able to compile an enviable record of educating some 130 worthy Scholars.

C. Evaluation—Please explain how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities. Describe your criteria for a successful program and the results you expect to have achieved by the end of the funding period.

Year after year, the Vidda Foundation Scholarship has been notably successful along our four main metrics for evaluating such initiatives: the academic caliber of the students it allows us to support; the objective need that it allows us to meet; the recipients’ persistence towards the degree; and their planned contributions to American or global society.

Caliber: We select the Vidda Scholars from a pool of our highest-achieving students. Very often they earn A’s in nearly every class, both inside and outside their major field of study.

Need: Potential Vidda Scholars must demonstrate a high degree of objective need, both through the FAFSA and a mandatory essay describing their personal financial situation. We use the Vidda Foundation’s grant specifically to enable them to fulfill their academic goals with a minimum of interruption or distraction arising from monetary concerns.

Persistence: One hundred percent of the Scholars complete their B.A. degree at Columbia.

Contribution: Like many of the highest-achieving students at GS, the Vidda Scholars are noteworthy for their ambitious and idealistic plans. This tendency is fully manifest in the biographical statements of the 2024-25 and 2025-26 classes of Scholars, who intend to make their mark in television production, physics, social impact litigation, and computer science.

We are certain that next year’s class of Vidda Scholars will equal its predecessors in merit, level of need, academic achievement, and potential to contribute to the betterment of society.

III. ATTACHMENTS—Please label all attachments to correspond to the bold-faced, capitalized items below.

A. Financial Information—Please provide the dates that each document covers.

1. **Your MOST RECENT FINANCIAL STATEMENT**, audited if available. This statement should reflect actual expenditures and funds received during your most recent fiscal year.

[FY 2025 Financial Statements for The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York](#)

2. Aligned side by side on the same page, your **OPERATING EXPENSE BUDGETS** for the current and most recent fiscal year. (in millions)

A. Income	FY '26 (estimated)	FY '25
Tuition and fees	\$136.7	\$133.6
Endowment income	5.6	4.6
Gifts and grants	2.5	2.5
SEOG funds	0.9	0.9
Total income:	145.7	141.6
B. Expenses		
Instruction and central administration	\$ 83.6	\$ 87.8
Financial aid	46.2	44.2
School administration	9.8	9.6
Total Expenses:	145.7	141.6

3. Aligned side by side on the same page, a list of foundation and corporate **SUPPORTERS** and all other sources of income, with amounts, for your current and most recent fiscal year. (in thousands)

	FY '26 (* = expected)	FY '25
Bloomberg Philanthropies	\$ 0	10
Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation	1,000	1,000
Crankstart Foundation	50*	50
de Lara Foundation	160*	160
Ford Foundation	0	200
Kenan Charitable Trust	500*	0
Once Upon a Time Foundation	95*	75
PSEG	5	5
Vidda Foundation	65	65

Additional philanthropic support was provided by numerous private individual donors.

4. Please list the foundations, corporations, and other **SOURCES** that you are **SOLICITING FOR FUNDING** and, to the best of your knowledge, the **STATUS OF YOUR PROPOSAL** with each.

- ***Kenan Charitable Trust:*** Solicited scholarship support for formerly incarcerated/justice-impacted students at Columbia School of General Studies. Status: Kenan Trustees approved; grant agreement finalized and awaiting signatures; funds expected by June 30, 2026. Note that this current-use award will be matched by institutional funds to establish an endowment to support scholarships for the same purpose.
- ***Once Upon a Time Foundation:*** We have asked to renew our participation in the Foundation's Philanthropy Lab program, as we want to continue to offer the course supported by the Foundation. The course, "Philanthropy and Just Societies," exposes students to the history of philanthropy and invites them to reflect upon the ethics, psychology, and sociology of giving and receiving aid. Status: Grant agreement fully executed, funds expected by June 30, 2026.
- ***Rothberg Family Charitable Foundation:*** Solicited contribution for a Donor Advised Fund which would be used to support scholarships at the School of General Studies and a project in Columbia's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Status: DAF funds received; designations to allocate funds for GS scholarships and Engineering project are pending.
- ***Juan Jacobo de Lara and Jonne Low de Lara Foundation:*** Renewal request for annual scholarship support. Status: Planned.
- ***Military Ball Sponsorship:*** We continue to solicit various corporations and foundations for sponsorship of the annual Columbia Military Ball and/or programmatic support of our Center for Veteran Transition and Integration. PSEG again renewed its sponsorship for 2025, and we plan to solicit them again for the November 2026 Ball. New sponsors for 2025 included Amazon, IBM, and D.E. Shaw, among others, and we plan to solicit them for renewed support. We continue to identify new potential corporate and foundation sponsors for the Ball. Status: Sponsorship requests planned.
- We are planning additional solicitations for scholarships or programmatic support which have not yet been submitted for consideration.

5. If project funding is requested:

- a. **A CURRENT EXPENSE BUDGET FOR THE PROJECT.** List each staff line separately and include % of time spent on the project. Indicate the specific uses of the requested grant, if possible.
- b. A list of all **SOURCES OF INCOME** toward the project, actual and prospective with amounts.

This year's financial aid budget at GS is \$46.2 million; that number will certainly increase in FY '27.

We are requesting \$65,000 to fund the Vidda Foundation Scholarship at GS, which is a vital part of our overall financial aid program. GS will cover all of the operating costs of the Scholarship, thereby allowing us to pass along 100% of the Foundation's grant to the designated Scholars.

B. Other Supporting Materials

1. A list of your Board of Directors, with their affiliations.

[Board of Visitors | School of General Studies \(columbia.edu\)](https://gs.columbia.edu/about/board-of-visitors)

2. A copy of your most recent IRS letter indicating your agency's tax exempt status, or, if not available, an explanation.

Please see the IRS Determination Letter, submitted with this document.

3. One-paragraph resumes of key staff, including qualifications relevant to the specific request.

Lisa Rosen-Metsch, Dean of the Columbia School of General Studies, is the first alumna of the School to serve in this role. She is an experienced academic administrator and a world-renowned authority on the prevention of HIV in populations with substance-abuse disorders. Prior to assuming the deanship, she was Chair of the Department of Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, where she remains a Professor.

Curtis Rodgers, Vice Dean, has played a key role over the last two decades in elevating GS to its current position as the nation's premier college for nontraditional students. He has developed pioneering ways to attract working people, military veterans, and community college graduates to the Columbia campus – and to assure their success once they arrive. Among his other responsibilities, he oversees the admissions, financial aid, and scholarship program at GS.

Marlyn Delva, Dean of Students, is a leader in the field of educational programming to foster inclusiveness in the higher education environment. Before moving to GS, she was Dean of Students at the Mailman School of Public Health. In her scholarly work, Dr. Delva focuses on the accessibility of health services and the impact of societal structures as these relate to populations of Caribbean origin.

Caroline Marvin, Dean of Academic Affairs, has served as a Director of Undergraduate Studies for the Neuroscience and Behavior major and has taught neuroscience and psychology courses at all levels. In her research, she aims to discover what motivates people to learn; how this desire evolves throughout the lifespan; and how we can leverage a better understanding of curiosity to improve classroom teaching.

4. Your most recent annual report, if available.

(not available)

5. No more than three examples of recent articles about, or evaluations of, your organization, if available.

[A Columbia Sweep: CC, GS, and SEAS Students Named US Gates Cambridge Scholars](#)

[Sasha Cohen '16GS On How To Top Highs Of Winning Olympic Silver At Just 21](#) (Forbes)

[How I Got My Career in Foreign Policy: Keren Yarhi-Milo '03GS](#) (Council on Foreign Relations)