

**F. M. KIRBY FOUNDATION SOLICITATION EVALUATION FORM**

**DATE:** April 7, 2024  
**Program Area:** Public Affairs/Society Benefit  
**Grant Type:** Board Grant

**REQUEST DATE:** March 1, 2024

**APPLICANT:**  
Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Inc.  
3901 Centerville Road  
Wilmington, DE 19807

**CONTACT:** Mr. John Burtka, President & Chief Executive Officer

**AMOUNT REQUESTED:** \$220,000  
**BUDGETED AMOUNT:** \$220,000

**NATURE OF REQUEST:** General Operating Support and Support of F. M. Kirby Campus Maintenance Fund

**GRANT HISTORY**

**SUPPORT:** 1978-2023

**# OF APPROVED GRANTS:** 46

**TOTAL DOLLARS:** \$5,808,500

**LAST GRANT DATE:** 05/01/2023

**LAST GRANT AMOUNT:** \$120,000

**FYE DATE:** 06/30

**AFS DATE:** 12/05/2023

<b>Year Approved</b>	<b>Approved Amount</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>	<b>Grant Purpose</b>
2023	\$120,000	05/01/2023	General Operating Support
2022	\$120,000	05/02/2022	General Operating Support
2021	\$120,000	05/03/2021	General Operating Support
2020	\$120,000	04/29/2020	General Operating Support
2019	\$125,000	04/15/2019	General Operating Support

**LAST SITE VISIT DATE:** February 2020

**ENDORSEE:** N/A

**FINANCIAL ANALYSIS COMMENTS:** The FY24 expense budget for Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) projects a 6% increase over the prior year actuals. The FY24 revenue budget projects a \$1.5M deficit and a 54% decrease from the prior year actuals. Please note that ISI received a \$4M

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restricted gift in FY23 for its Honors Scholars program, and several large gifts in previous years related to the construction of the Bean Conference Center. The FY23 audit shows unrestricted net assets totaling \$18.3M, and a cash position of \$1.6M – a decrease in cash assets of \$5.1M since FY22, largely due to capital expenditures related to the Bean Center. Investments are valued at \$12.4M, an increase of \$5.8M since FY22. Total endowment value is \$8.4M. Financial assets available for general expenditures within 12 months are \$7.1M. In FY23, ISI received contributions from staff and Board members totaling \$275K. As per the FY23 audit, supporting services represented 21.8% of functional expenses. ISI has lines of credit with two banks totaling \$3.5M. As of June 30, 2023, there were no balances. FMKF last approved a grant to ISI in FY23. The amount accounted for 1.4% of grants and contributions.

**ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION:** Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) was founded in 1953 to promote an understanding amongst college students of the economic, political, and ethical values that sustain a free and humane society. Today, ISI still cultivates a vibrant community of students, faculty, and alumni, equipping them with the intellectual tools needed to understand and uphold these core ideals of Western civilization. ISI's programs include campus-based societies, regional conferences and debates, seminars and lectures, campus publications, undergraduate and graduate internships and fellowships, alumni networking and conferences, and a quarterly journal, *Modern Age*. These programs serve undergraduate and graduate students and alumni in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, as well as occasional participants from Canada.

In September 2023, ISI officially opened the Linda L. Bean Center at F.M. Kirby Campus, thanks to a \$5M gift from the Maine native. The space features a Great Hall for lectures, debates, dinners, and seminars, as well as smaller spaces for quiet reading and study. With the completion of the Bean Center, ISI is beginning the next exciting chapter and drawing closer to the fulfillment of its Roots of American Renewal Campaign: a strategic plan to restore learning and leadership. The aim is to take up George Washington's vision of a national institution of higher learning, which will strengthen our republic through learning, friendship, and leadership. The five-year campaign culminates in 2026 on the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

**EMILY PRINCE COMMENTS:** In FY24, ISI is seeking a grant of \$220K - \$120K general operating support and \$100K to establish the F. M. Kirby Campus Stewardship Fund.

**General Operations/Programs:** Since ISI's last application, I noticed a marked shift in their student membership, student society, and Collegiate Network numbers reported for the academic year. I had a suspicion about what had happened based on statements in the narrative, but reached out to Ethan Swain, Director of Major Gifts, for clarification. ISI has been working hard not to just grow its core educational programs, but to grow them in ways that result in sustainable and enduring student activity. What ISI has focused on this last year is reaching the *right* students and developing ways to ensure that leadership succession plans are in place for all ISI on-campus organizations. This way, they are not just recruiting talented students, but also engaging them in meaningful ways to ensure they will stay active throughout their busy college years. This model also ensures that the groups they start and participate in will last long after founding students graduate. This intentional work began with an internal audit in the fall of 2023. What they found was that during the pandemic, specifically the academic years of 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23, ISI gave student groups more leeway to be counted as active societies, as students were, to varying degrees,

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unable to gather in groups on campus, host events on campus, or attend other events. This meant that while ISI was adding new societies, other existing, less active societies still wanted to be affiliated with ISI but were sometimes unable to be active in the way ISI would hope. At the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year, ISI reinstated its rigorous criteria for an active society which led to a decrease in the number of active societies on the roster post-Covid, from 175 to 122, but the societies now counted on the roster are deeply engaged and more meaningfully involved with ISI. ISI's goal for the current academic year is to maintain this number. The same is true of the Collegiate Network Newspapers, whose requirements had been relaxed during the pandemic and were reinstated in the fall of 2023. Member publications who had not published within one year were omitted from the network and invited to reapply for membership once a new issue was printed, or once new articles were published online, resulting in a decrease from 82 sponsored papers to 78. While student groups often experience periods of ebb and flow, the resulting attrition from the audit made ISI's overall student membership count lower than originally anticipated at the beginning of the academic year at 12,047. Dedicated Program Officers are actively working with ISI Societies and CN publications that have gone defunct to revive their groups and engage new student leaders on those campuses. ISI's goal in doing this work is to grow their overall membership to 14K this academic year.

So far, recruitment and engagement efforts are paying off, with ISI seeing a more than 15-fold increase in views of videos across social media platforms – representing more than 5.4M individual views – and a 66% increase in social media following across platforms, with total followers now surpassing 68K. While online content viewership and engagement are certainly not substitutes for an ISI education, the increase in audience size is very useful for extending ISI's reach and growing its pool of program applicants. In addition to its social media presence, ISI has hosted more than 150 lectures, conferences, and debates around the country, ranging from 200 person gatherings to smaller campus reading groups. They added five more large-scale debates in the Arthur N. Rupe Foundation Debate series, which are also professionally filmed to market the content for ongoing educational engagement. Eighteen “Little Platoon Seminar” conferences allowed ISI to extend their reach, as their locations were chosen due to their accessibility to multiple schools, ISI societies, and college faculty, while the annual ISI Honors Scholars Program kicked off its yearlong intensive for 50 top students with a weeklong conference in Annapolis. With its societies, Collegiate Network, seminars, fellowships, and educational series, ISI goes to great lengths to offer a range of programming and experiences for a varying audience. In the year ahead they seem to be placing more emphasis on the quality of their offerings over quantity, paying particular attention to their faculty and alumni members with new and expanded programming like the American Politics and Government Summit.

**F. M. Kirby Campus Stewardship Fund:** ISI is seeking a lead gift to establish a maintenance and program fund to support its activities on Kirby campus. The fund would be named the F. M. Kirby Campus Stewardship Fund (the Fund). The intent of the Fund is to provide for the ongoing maintenance needs of the land and buildings that comprise the Kirby Campus as well as to provide support for ISI's wide range of onsite programming. The property consists of F. M. Kirby Hall (12K sf.), a carriage house (2.6K sf.), a caretaker's cottage (3.6K sf.), and the Bean Center (7K sf.). The goal is to raise \$25M, which would cover ISI's annual expenses on Kirby Campus in perpetuity, considering inflation and buffering for unforeseen expenses. ISI's Chief Operating

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Officer, Paul Rhein, will serve as lead administrator and project director of the Fund and its supporting activities.

- **Programming:** In addition to its core programs, ISI is committed to hosting the following major events at the Kirby Campus each year: the American Politics and Government Summit, the ISI Honors Program annual conference, the ISI Society Leaders Conference, ISI's Homecoming Weekend, and two brand new ISI Summer Schools. These events will serve a mix of undergraduates, alumni, and faculty, and provide an opportunity for participants to gather, network, advance research, and engage in spirited discussions. The anticipated cost per event ranges from \$120K-\$234K depending on the length and number of attendees, with total costs estimated at \$801,900 annually. ISI hopes to eventually host up to 35 events on campus each year, as well as open the Bean Center for private events which will bring in additional revenue.
- **Property Enhancements & Maintenance:** Now that the Bean Center is complete, ISI estimates that the annual cost to maintain the expanded Kirby Campus will be \$354,600 per year. Categories include propane for heating, electricity, custodial services, HVAC, building security, landscape maintenance, etc. The maintenance-specific goal for the Fund is \$7M.

ISI initially raised the possibility of establishing a **MAINTENANCE** fund with me in 2023. The goal at the time was \$5M and campus expenses were estimated at \$260,000. With the opening of the Bean Center, maintenance expenses have increased substantially, and ISI is now thinking bigger about its long-term growth and sustainability. As a result, programming was incorporated into the conversation and the Fund. I went back to Ethan Swain to get more perspective on the shift. ISI's argument in favor of establishing a combined Fund is that covering recurring expenses will make the increasing programming on Kirby Campus sustainable and give them the freedom to spend a larger percentage of the operating budget on growing core programs. However, if FMKF would prefer to fund only maintenance expenses and not programmatic expenses, they are happy to divide the fund into two to distinguish where our grant would be allocated. If approved, the maintenance only fund will be named the F. M. Kirby Campus Maintenance Fund. ISI had initially hoped FMKF would provide a lead gift of \$2M, but I informed them the resources simply weren't there for an award of that size and steered them towards the \$100K number currently before the Board, which is consistent with recent lead endowment gifts, such as the one awarded to Durham Academy in FY23. (Our 2/2/24 site visit report provides more context; please let me know if you would like to read the report.) ISI has identified other sources of support for the Fund (or possibly Funds), a mix of families and foundations, and are in conversation about several six- and seven-figure requests.

I had the opportunity to attend President & CEO John Burtka's book launch on 2/22/24 and was impressed with his vision for the organization, even if a bit concerned with the pace of its capital growth – the Bean Center has been open less than 6 months and there is already talk of another major capital project for on-site lodging in the next 3-5 years. Though membership and society numbers have decreased, I applaud ISI for not simply allowing societies to affiliate without doing the work, and believe they have a strong plan for moving forward. Core programs such as the Honors and Graduate Fellowship Programs continue to serve the same number of scholars consistently. The organization has a strong financial position, but they are smart to be thinking

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about the long-term burden of maintaining a large and aging campus. Therefore, in FY24, I recommend a grant of \$220K as requested and budgeted - \$120K general operating support and \$100K support of the F. M. Kirby Campus **Maintenance** Fund.

**RECOMMENDATION:** In FY24, I recommend a grant of \$220K in support of general operations and the F. M. Kirby Campus **Maintenance** Fund, to be allocated as follows:

\$120K general operating  
\$100K F. M. Kirby Campus **Maintenance** Fund

**JUSTIN J. KICZEK COMMENTS:** Given statistics about how fearful students are of voicing their opinions in classrooms if they stray from the campus's dominant ideology, ISI and the Kirby Campus must be a serious breath of fresh air, a place where students are finding themselves both challenged academically but also free to test out their theories and ideas in a more welcoming climate. Certainly, students are voting with their feet, as we have seen ISI find ways to draw more students to its campus and own programs, especially with the upcoming summer seminars and the "Little Platoon" seminars.

Given the centrality of the F. M. Kirby Campus for ISI's programming and identity – the very fact that they have a homecoming weekend speaks to their dream of being a "counter-university" – I am in favor of supporting the maintenance fund as well. I recommend we return to the \$100 – 120K range in years to come.

**RECOMMENDATION:** I recommend a grant of \$220,000 in support of general operations and the F. M. Kirby Campus **Maintenance** Fund, to be allocated as follows:

\$120,000 in general operating support  
\$100,000 for the F. M. Kirby Campus **Maintenance** Fund

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**DISPOSITION:**

- Declination
- Hold for review on/about:
- Approval for: **\$220,000**
- Recommended Grant Payment(s):  
**2024:**  
**2025:**  
**2026:**
- Hold for Board Review: **April 26, 2024**
- Payee Other Than Addressee:
- Insert Information:  
**General Operating Support - \$120,000**  
**Support of F. M. Kirby Campus Maintenance Fund - \$100,000**
- Other:

Initials: JK

Date: 04/11/2024

Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_