

Outlook on Federal Funding Threats to Libraries

What library workers need to know to advocate for their institutions

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Several federal funding issues are currently under debate in Congress and could adversely affect libraries and library workers. These include a possible government shutdown if Congress doesn't pass the fiscal year (FY) 2025 spending bill by March 14, President Trump's proposed FY 2026 budget, and threats to broadband funding for libraries.

The following is what library workers need to know—and what they can do to stand up and speak out for needed resources.

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On April 7, ALA released its *State of America's Libraries 2025* report, an annual snapshot of library trends, as part of National Library Week taking place April 6–12. As in recent years, the 2025 report documented censorship in libraries from the previous year. In 2024, ALA recorded 821 attempts to censor library books and other materials across all library types. This is a decrease from the 1,247 attempts that were recorded in 2023 but still the third-highest number since ALA began tracking library censorship in 1990.



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Federal budget battles

The previous Congress's failure to pass FY2025 spending bills that were due October 1, 2024, resulted in a temporary funding measure that extended federal spending at FY2024 levels through March 14. Now, nearly halfway into FY2025, congressional leaders are still divided on final spending levels.

(<http://americanlibrariesbuyersguide.com/>).

If the FY2024 budget isn't passed by the March 14 deadline, options include continuing with another temporary funding measure at FY2024 levels; cutting non-defense spending across the board, which requires cuts aligned to executive orders; or a government shutdown.

A shutdown would have cascading impacts across the nation, including customer service inquiries to the IRS grinding to a halt during tax season and a delay in paychecks to federal employees, and the closure of the Library of Congress and National Archives.

Libraries on federally owned land, such as military bases, may be temporarily disrupted or closed. Federal grant applications may be put on hold and delayed. However, in the event the shutdown is short, the shutdown's effects on libraries would likely be minimal.

The following activities would be expected to continue unhindered:

- Student loan disbursements will continue as normal as an essential service.
- Immediate funding to state libraries through the Library Services and Technology Act's (LSTA) Grants to States program will not be affected since some funding has already been disbursed. State authorities will be able to continue supporting local programs and subgrants.
- Some grant funding administered by the Department of Education was already disbursed to state agencies. Comprehensive Literacy State Development grants, Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grants, and Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies are not likely to see a disruption.

However, actions the Trump administration may take in response to the shutdown are still in question, given the administration's willingness to take unprecedented measures to defund federal initiatives. During Trump's first term, the White House proposed major budget cuts or closures to library and library-related agencies and programs, and the same is expected for FY2026.

In 2017, President Trump proposed eliminating the IAL program and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, including nearly \$200 million in LSTA funding. Congress rejected these efforts repeatedly thanks to vocal library advocates across the country. Now, with control of the House, Senate, and White House, fiscal conservatives are emboldened to cut trillions of dollars from the national budget.

More funding threats: broadband discounts and hotspots

Congress also is considering two joint resolutions that would end the new E-Rate hotspot lending program for libraries and schools, which was adopted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in July 2024 (<https://www.ala.org/news/2024/07/ala-praises-fcc-vote-make-wi-fi-hotspots-eligible-e-rate-funding>). With the application deadline for E-Rate funding closing on March 26, nearly 1,000 libraries and schools have already applied.

The American Library Association (ALA) is actively defending the hotspot lending program on Capitol Hill. This program helps bridge the digital divide for under-resourced communities and for all library patrons in times of disaster and emergency. If passed, the resolution would permanently eliminate the program and leave little opportunity to reinstate connectivity programs in the future.

The Universal Service Fund (USF) case, currently pending with the US Supreme Court, is another front in efforts to undermine access to information and library funding. Universal service is the principle that all Americans should have access to communications services. USF supports the E-Rate program as well as others.

ALA filed an amicus brief in January (<https://www.ala.org/news/2025/01/ala-files-us-supreme-court-amicus-brief-affirming-universal-service-e-rate-program>) in support of the FCC and the Schools, Health, and Libraries Broadband Coalition, the petitioners in this case. The brief affirms that the USF is constitutional and provides the library perspective on the importance of the E-Rate program and its uses across the country.

Oral arguments are set for March 26, with a decision expected in June. Many public interest groups and communities invested in universal service, including ALA, are coordinating to develop policy proposals that preserve USF programs and improve their

sustainability. Education and awareness campaigns are ongoing to ensure that members of Congress recognize the value of the USF programs in their states.

Show Up for Our Libraries

Many member of Congress are not aware of the impacts of investing in libraries. Voters can communicate to them that cuts to LSTA and E-Rate will be painful for libraries and their communities.

In January, ALA launched a campaign to harness the collective power of library advocates to influence elected leaders and policymakers before decisions are made. [Show Up for Our Libraries](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries) (<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries>) provides the following ways that advocates can help educate decision makers:

- Sharing library stories that ALA can use in publications, media referrals, issue briefs, and meetings on Capitol Hill
- Sending personalized emails and making phone calls to senators and representatives
- Hosting a member of Congress for a library tour
- Sharing the campaign with patrons and other stakeholders

These actions can help ensure that when threats to funding and other issues affecting libraries arise, elected leaders understand the opportunities that library programs, services, and staff members provide to their constituents.

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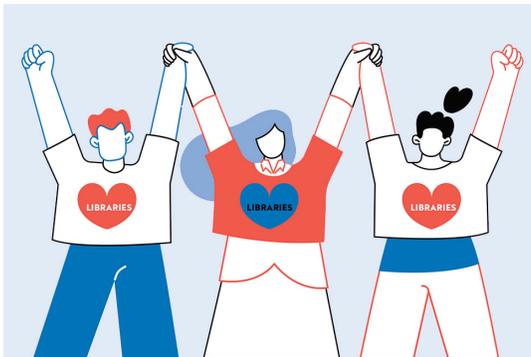


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