

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Nation World

NEWS > NATION

At least 1,200 grants canceled as NEH cuts target humanities across U.S.

April 8, 2025 | Updated Tue., April 8, 2025 at 8:05 p.m.



Shelly C. Lowe was chair of National Endowment for the Humanities until her departure in March. MUST CREDIT: Demetrius Freeman/The Washington Post (Demetrius Freeman/The Washington Post)

--	--	--

By Janay Kingsberry and Anne Branigin
Washington Post

More than 1,200 grants that support culture and history programs across the country are estimated to have been cut by the National Endowment for the Humanities, according to a coalition that advocates for the agency targeted last week in the Trump administration's efforts to overhaul the federal government and reshape American culture.

On April 1, the New York Times reported that representatives of the U.S. DOGE Service, or the Department of Government Efficiency, told NEH managers it was looking to cut as much as 70 to 80 percent of the agency's roughly 180-person staff. The next day, humanities councils in all 50 states received notice that their grants were being terminated.

"We've been hearing from hundreds of grant recipients who had their grants canceled," said Stephen Kidd, executive director of the National Humanities Alliance, which supports humanities and NEH funding on Capitol Hill. He said they believe at least 1,200 grants have been terminated, based on outreach from recipients through the organization's action alert page.

The NEH approves more than 1,000 of the 5,000-plus grant applications it receives each year, according to its most recent budget request.

The loss of potentially thousands of such grants has left recipients reeling and prompted some organizations to mobilize, as millions of dollars of previously approved funding were stripped from state humanities councils, museums, historic sites, archives, libraries, educators and media outlets.

Among them was the Japanese American National Museum, based in Los Angeles, which took a public stand against the cuts over the weekend. Ann Burroughs, the museum's chief executive, said the institution was considering "all options," including a possible class-action lawsuit.

"There's a lot of fear" among educators, historians and institution heads, which is why museum leadership felt it important to take a stand, said Bill Fujioka, chair of the museum's board of trustees.

"The cuts today are worse than the cuts yesterday," Fujioka said. "But there's going to be more."

President Donald Trump's administration has aggressively sought to reshape the nation's arts programming to fit the president's priorities. This has included prioritizing projects

about the Declaration of Independence, targeting “anti-American ideology” at the Smithsonian Institution and purging the Kennedy Center’s board of trustees, who then made him chair.

Congress funded NEH with \$207 million last year, an amount Kidd called “decimal dust” in federal terms but critical to programs across the country. About 40 percent of NEH’s program funding goes to state humanities councils for operating support and grant making, Kidd said. “Without that funding, a lot of important history and heritage in small archives and museums and libraries and towns will just be lost.”

The NEH did not respond to requests for comment.

The cuts affect a broad range of programs and services, including state-specific efforts to reduce Alaska’s adolescent suicide rate and help Alabama educators teach civil rights history, as well as nationwide projects to digitize small-town newspapers and bring Smithsonian exhibits to rural and remote communities.

Humanities Texas, which receives 65 percent of its annual budget from NEH, said the cuts will have a “devastating effect” on programs. Colorado Humanities, the state’s humanities council, said its programs and events reach more than 300,000 Coloradans annually, costing about 21 cents per person.

“The value to education, cultural preservation, and civic life provided by our resources and opportunities vastly exceeds the investment,” the organization said in a joint statement with other Western state humanities groups. “No other funding source in Colorado, public or private, could replace us.”

DOGE, the cost-cutting effort tied with Elon Musk, has moved quickly to cut federal spending by scaling back or gutting federal agencies in an effort to further Trump’s agenda. It’s unclear if there will be similar cuts at the National Endowment for the Arts, which was founded alongside the NEH in 1965. The NEA did not respond to a request for comment.

Last week’s target was denounced by state humanities councils and cultural organizations such as the American Historical Association, which released a statement Friday condemning “the evisceration” of the NEH.

“This frontal attack on the nation’s public culture is unpatriotic, anti-American and unjustified,” the statement said, adding that Trump’s approach “prioritizes narrow

political ideology over historical research, historical accuracy, and the actual historical experiences of Americans.”

The AHA said hundreds of grant recipients had been alerted (“using a nongovernmental microsoft.com email address”) that their funding had been terminated on Wednesday.

Grant termination notices signed by NEH acting chair Michael McDonald - who replaced Shelly C. Lowe after Trump directed her departure last month - said that the funds were being reallocated to “a new direction in furtherance of the President’s agenda,” according to copies of the letter reviewed by The Washington Post.

“Your grant’s immediate termination is necessary to safeguard the interests of the federal government, including its fiscal priorities,” the letter read.

Grantees are now dealing with the fallout.

Roberta Pergher, a history professor at Indiana University, received a grant termination letter last week. Pergher had received funding to write a book exploring how Italy’s fascist government “reconceptualized what it means to be a citizen” and won public support.

This was Pergher’s third time applying for an NEH grant, and her first successful proposal. It was an “incredibly precious” opportunity, she said.

Pergher is committed to finishing the book. What concerns her more, she said, is both the breadth of Trump’s actions and Congress’s inaction. “I really feel that I am part of a much larger wrong that is being done to science and knowledge and education, and I think the American people more broadly,” Pergher said.

Siovahn Walker, executive director of the American Musicological Society, said the organization is rallying its members to help cover \$363,000 in lost funding after the NEH canceled four of its grants last week. (The grants, which were awarded last year, totaled around \$1 million, she said.) The AMS had an additional \$1.3 million in grant applications still under review by the NEH, money the organization no longer expects to receive.

Walker said the AMS is trying to secure funding and to better understand the letter’s legal ramifications. The grant termination said grantees’ “obligations” still applied, and said an audit could follow termination.

Oleh Kotsyuba, director of print and digital publications at Harvard University's self-funded Ukrainian Research Institute, was celebrating his birthday on April 3 when he learned the institute's grant had ended. The funding, awarded in October through the NEH's Scholarly Editions and Translations program, supported the English translation of Ukrainian literature.

"We're all devastated," Kotsyuba said. "Ukraine has been under massive Russian assault for three and a half years now. ... We were really hoping for some help to more evenly distribute the work for which there is a lot of demand."

Now the department is seeking donations and book purchases by individuals and libraries to support its work.

As the NEH began pulling the plug on funding these programs, it also culled its own ranks. Staffers were placed on immediate administrative leave last week via a letter signed by the acting NEH chair.

Some lawsuits have begun testing the legality of the administration's terminations of congressionally approved programs. On Friday, attorneys general from 21 states announced they were suing the Trump administration over its March order shutting down the Institute of Museum and Library services, which supports museums and libraries nationwide.

Fujioka, of the Japanese American National Museum, noted that the stakes were high for the institution. Last week, the NEH canceled a \$190,000 grant for the museum. But it stands to lose even more money, Fujioka said, particularly if it doesn't comply with the Trump administration's orders to tamp down diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) language and initiatives.

"We're not scrubbing anything," Fujioka vowed. To do so would be contrary to the museum's mission, he said.

"You can't erase history, but they're trying to."

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Local journalism is essential.

Give directly to The Spokesman-Review's Northwest Passages community forums series - - which helps to offset the costs of several reporter and editor positions at the newspaper -- by using the easy options below. Gifts processed in this system are not tax deductible, but are predominately used to help meet the local financial requirements needed to receive national matching-grant funds.

 Active Person

 Powered by Givebuttr



Subscribe now to get breaking news alerts in your email inbox

Get breaking news delivered to your inbox as it happens.

Sign up



Baumgartner aims to transform college sports with bill that would dissolve NCAA

Updated 5:19 a.m.

RFK Jr. tells CDC to change its guidance on fluoride in drinking water

How conservatives are using Columbia as a 'test case' to enforce Trump's agenda

'An attack on lawyers!': Dearborn attorney says fed agents detained him at Detroit airport



Breaking ground in improving the health of local communities

Getting the right healthcare looks different for everyone, and Premera Blue Cross knows that equal access doesn't always lead to equally helpful care.

© Copyright 2016, The Spokesman-Review