

Arizona museums, libraries could lose \$3.8 million in grants from federal cuts

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Chief Science Officer Kimberlie McCue stands in the Desert Botanical Garden's herbarium with a collection of more than 100,000 specimen. The storage seen in the background is the spacesaver mobile system funded by IMLS. (Photo by [Samantha Rea](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/samantha-rea/)) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/samantha-rea/>)/Cronkite News)

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PHOENIX – President Donald Trump’s executive order slashing several small federal agencies could cripple key Arizona library and museum programs, wiping out Wi-Fi hotspot lending, literacy efforts, foster family services and more.

The March 14 order reduced operations for seven agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services. It requires that “entities shall be eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law.”

The IMLS administers grant programs, conducts research and offers resources for improving library and museum services. Since 2020, the Arizona State Library has distributed more than \$18 million in IMLS funds.

It's uncertain what will happen to already awarded grants or how future federal allocations will be affected. According to a written statement by the Arizona Secretary of State's Office, the Arizona State Library was awarded \$3.8 million in Library Services and Technology Act funds in fiscal 2024, which ends in September 2025.

On April 4, Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes joined 19 other attorneys general in filing a lawsuit to stop the dismantling of the IMLS and two other federal agencies. The lawsuit is led by attorneys general from New York and Rhode Island.

"In communities across Arizona, libraries aren't just a place to borrow books – they're a lifeline," Mayes said. "From high-speed internet access to job training and after-school programs, our libraries rely on federal support to serve the Arizonans who depend on and benefit from them. Stripping that support away will widen the divide between the haves and the have-nots – and would especially devastate youth literacy programs that help Arizona's kids learn to read, grow and succeed."

If a library were to lose IMLS funding for an after-school program, working parents in the surrounding area may be without options for after-school care, said Jason Macoviak, library manager of the Copper Queen Library in Bisbee. In a town like Bisbee, where the median household income is below \$47,000, after-school programs are essential for children who don't have a parent at home when the school day is over.

Tribal communities throughout the state would be affected as well. The Arizona State Library awarded 10 tribal communities nearly \$367,000 in IMLS funds through the Native American Library Services program for the current fiscal year.

The Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation received \$10,000 to partner with Wassaja Family Services and help foster families on and off the reservation by maintaining children's connection to their tribe and traditions. The funds pay for resources, programs and cultural events and partner with foster group homes.

The tribal library of the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians received more than \$137,000 to develop the "Kaibab Strong Foundations" project. The project – focused on early childhood education, family engagement and literacy – offers family events, skills development workshops and advocacy programs.

Through IMLS funding, the Ak-Chin Indian Community provided pick-up services to help children get to the library for programming and resources.

Bisbee's Macoviak said the IMLS grants are among the "easiest, most impactful ways" small libraries can pay for bigger projects for the community.

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A *Lotus rigidus*, or Shrubby Deervetch, specimen in the Desert Botanical Garden herbarium. (Photo by [Samantha Rea](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/samantha-rea/) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/samantha-rea/>)/Cronkite News)

The Copper Queen Library has grant funding to open an annex in the neighborhood farthest from the library. The annex serves a community that borders Naco, Arizona, and Naco, Sonora, Mexico.

The library started a Wi-Fi hotspot lending program through IMLS funding years ago, Macoviak said. It is one of their most popular programs, supported by the city, and there is usually a list of about 15 to 20 people waiting to use 40 devices, which can be checked out for three weeks at a time.

“If we can’t apply for federal funding to do programs and services, that’s just less engagement with our community,” he said. “Our community expects us to come up with these wonderful things and they look forward to it.”

Kimberlie McCue, chief science officer at the Desert Botanical Garden, said initiatives with IMLS funds have allowed the garden to stretch into the community.

The garden is home to an extensive collection of plant life, classifying it as a living museum. It has received IMLS funding for decades, awarded for the first time in 1998. Thanks to an IMLS grant awarded in 2011, the DBG created the Live Collections Management System, a publicly accessible database of the plant collections in the garden. Previously, the database could only be accessed by a few botanical garden staff.

An IMLS grant was also used to improve storage for the garden’s extensive herbarium. The grant, awarded in 2014, funded the processing and addition of almost 1,000 specimens and installation of a spacesaver mobile system and 60 additional storage cases to store specimens. The herbarium’s oldest specimen was collected in 1824.

The DBG is using funds awarded in 2024 to develop conservation plans for at-risk pollinators like bees, birds and bats in collaboration with the Arizona Monarch Collaborative. The goal is to “build capacity and community engagement around at-risk pollinators within the state of Arizona and the larger region.”

There are 1,300 bee species native to Arizona, according to the “[AZ Bee Identification Guide](https://www.pollinator.org/pollinator.org/assets/generalFiles/AZ_bee_guide_FINAL.pdf) (https://www.pollinator.org/pollinator.org/assets/generalFiles/AZ_bee_guide_FINAL.pdf)” available on the Grand Canyon Trust website.

McCue said people may not realize the impact of these programs. Plants are dependent on pollinators, whether it be wildflowers or crop plants, she said. So, if these conservation efforts are diminished, broccoli and super blooms that create fields of wildflowers could be affected.

IMLS funding goes beyond programs that serve community needs; it also supports the development of library and museum educational resources.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum received IMLS funding in 2021 to partner with the Flowing Wells Unified School District to offer “We Bee Scientists” to K-6 students. The three-year partnership allowed the museum to develop a curriculum for kids to learn about their local environment. The curriculum is free for any teacher in southern Arizona to use.

“There’s a wide swath of programs across the country that they [IMLS] fund, particularly for younger generations,” said Catherine Bartlett, associate director of education for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson. “There’s a lot of after-school programs, library programs, museum programs. Without that, those kids wouldn’t get the supplementary educational advances that these programs are delivering.”

McCue said the funding creates more than just goodwill.

“When we know that our impact goes far beyond our garden gates, that’s the best feeling of all because it means what we’re doing matters and it matters to a lot of people,” McCue said.

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