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# Entire staff at federal agency that funds libraries and museums put on leave

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 Andrew Limbong



The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the main source of federal funding for libraries.

*Shannon Finney/Institute of Museum and Library Services*

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has placed its entire staff on administrative leave.

The IMLS is a relatively small federal agency, with around 70 employees, that awards grant funding to museums and libraries across the United States.

This month, President Trump named Keith E. Sonderling — the deputy secretary of labor — the new acting director of IMLS. This followed Trump's previous executive order shrinking seven federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

According to a statement from AFGE Local 3403, which represents IMLS workers, the agency's staff was notified by email about being placed on paid administrative leave for up to 90 days, after a "brief meeting between DOGE staff and IMLS leadership." Employees had to turn in government property, and email accounts were disabled.



## CULTURE

### How will Trump's executive order affect the Smithsonian?

## What is the IMLS?

The IMLS is an independent federal agency that provides grants to libraries and museums across the country. According to the American Library Association, the IMLS provides "the majority of federal library funds." The IMLS says it awarded \$266 million in grants and research funding to cultural institutions last year. This money goes to help staff, fund maintenance and create new programs. In comparison, the projected 2025 budget for the National Endowment for the Arts was \$210 million.

For instance, in 2023 the IMLS funded projects such as a workforce training program, including internships, at the Museum of Discovery and Science in Florida, a pilot program in Iowa to help library staff address patrons' psychological needs and basic library functions (books, computers, internet) for various Native American tribes. You can find programs that the IMLS has funded to libraries and museums in your state through its dashboard.

According to the advocacy group EveryLibrary, public libraries are primarily funded by city and county taxes. And federal funds account for a much smaller portion of a library's budget. However, the group issued a statement following Trump's executive order, saying that "without this core federal funding for state libraries, museums, and archives, we risk losing critical programs and services in every state."



## CULTURE

### Trump wants to restore statues and monuments. Will that happen?

According to AFGE Local 3403, the status of grants that were previously awarded is unclear. And, the union statement said, without staff to administer the programs, it's likely most grants will be terminated.

Steve Potash is the CEO of OverDrive, which distributes digital products such as audiobooks, e-books and movies to libraries. He said in an interview that small and rural libraries will be most affected by cuts to federal funding.

"When a public library which has growing demand for their online and digital materials is getting any kind of budget cuts, hard decisions have to be made," said Potash.

*Meghan Sullivan edited this story.*

## Clarification

### April 1, 2025

An earlier version of this story stated that employees of the IMLS were put on paid administrative leave for 90 days. The email they received states it is "up to" 90 days. Also, the story initially stated the Museum of Discovery and Science is in Orlando. It is in another part of Florida, Fort Lauderdale.

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