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Trump Order Threatens University Libraries, Museums

The president disbanded the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Academic researchers, librarians and museum professionals say defunding the agency undermines their commitment to education.

By [Kathryn Palmer](#)



Advocates say the cuts to the institute “could be devastating for academic institutions which rely on federal funding to advance their educational mission.”

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▲ \$10,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services is allowing a tribal

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libraries, also awarded a historically Black university in Virginia \$52,000 to digitize an archival collection about the women's college it absorbed in 1932. And an academic researcher in Florida is counting on a \$150,000 grant to help school librarians better support students who are autistic.

But as of last week, those and hundreds of other federally funded programs at museums and libraries—many housed at cash-strapped colleges and universities—are in jeopardy.

President Donald Trump issued an executive order last Friday eliminating “to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law” the IMLS and six other federal entities he’s deemed “unnecessary,” including the United States Agency for Global Media, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at the Smithsonian Institution.

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at higher education institutions across the country.

With libraries and museums emerging as one of Trump’s latest targets, librarians, archivists, museum professionals and academic researchers maintain that IMLS funding is essential to colleges, universities and the communities they serve.

“The agency plays a crucial role in providing humanities access to Americans, especially in rural areas,” the American Historical Association said in a statement Wednesday, imploring members to contact their congressional representatives in protest. “Libraries and museums are central nodes in the networks of historical work, as sites of both research and teaching. Both constitute an essential aspect of the infrastructure of historical work in the United States.”

Kristina Durocher, president of the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries, said in an email that cuts to IMLS “could be devastating for academic institutions which rely on federal funding to advance their educational mission and for those who serve as the primary arts and cultural resource in their communities,” forcing them “to be even more creative as they weigh their priorities.”

Cut Off ‘At the Knees’

The bulk of the agency’s budget—which totaled about \$295 million in 2024, or roughly 0.005 percent of the overall federal budget—supports basic library services, including high-speed internet access, Braille and talking books for people with visual impairments, and workforce development training.

“By eliminating the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, the Trump administration’s executive order is cutting off at the knees the most beloved and trusted of

American institutions and the staff and services they offer.” the American Library

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and special libraries deserve more, not less support.”

State and local public libraries and museums are most dependent on IMLS funding, but many grant recipients who work in higher education say eliminating the independent agency will also make it harder for colleges and universities—already facing substantial cuts to other federal funding sources—to carry out their teaching, learning and research missions.

“IMLS funding has paved the way for my career and allowed me to do the work I do,” said Amelia Anderson, an assistant professor in the School of Information at the University of South Florida. “It’s the funding I received as a research assistant as a grad student. It provided my full salary as a postdoc. I received IMLS funding as a co-[principal investigator] and now as a PI.”

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Anderson's latest award from IMLS funds a partnership with Old Dominion University in

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autistic students. The \$150,000 grant was supposed to pay for training, surveys and researcher salaries, including Anderson's and a graduate assistant's.

But after Trump's executive order, she doesn't know if she can still count on receiving the money she needs to carry out her project—and help make libraries more inclusive. If the worst-case scenario comes to pass, it won't stop her research altogether, though “it won't be on the same scale.”

Undermines ‘Intellectual Growth’

Individual IMLS-funded projects like Anderson's don't exist in a vacuum; they support a broader ecosystem connecting public, school and academic libraries.

“The magic of the library translates from one library to the next ... People who were library users as kids feel more comfortable going into their academic library or finding careers in libraries,” she said. “Libraries are one of the few third spaces that remain, where we're not charging you to come in. It's just a welcoming space for any member of the community.”

Congress established IMLS (which is overseen by [the National Museum and Library Services Board](#), which includes 20 presidential appointees) in 1996 to “create strong libraries and museums that connect people with information and ideas” that envision “a democratic society where communities and individuals thrive with broad public access to knowledge, cultural heritage, and lifelong learning.”

The IMLS and other federal agencies that have helped support museums and libraries for the better part of a century have long had bipartisan support. Trump, however, has had his sights on dismantling the agency since his first term in office. In 2018, Congress rejected

his proposal to defund IMLS, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National

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Two months into his second term, however, Trump hasn't been waiting for lawmakers' approval to gut funding for federal agencies, including the IMLS, the Department of Education, the National Institutes of Health and a host of other agencies that support colleges and universities.

Judges have blocked some of those orders for now, and it's unclear if Trump's order to eliminate IMLS will face legal challenges before taking full effect.

But if IMLS funding does disappear, it would "substantially diminish academic libraries' capacity to enhance knowledge creation, innovation, and equitable access to information for students, scholars, faculty, and the broader public," Leo Lo, president of the Association of College and Research Libraries, said in a statement.

"IMLS has consistently provided crucial support to American colleges and universities, both public and private, driving significant advancements in research, teaching, and information access," Lo continued. "This move undermines our collective commitment to education, research, and intellectual growth."

Written By

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