

Home / News / Political News / What's Happening With the In...

What's Happening With the Institute of Museum and Library Services After Trump's Executive Order

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has been added to the list of government agencies targeted by President Donald Trump

By Associated Press | March 20, 2025

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JACQUELYN MARTIN

A person wearing a shirt covered in books holds a copy of the novel "Fahrenheit 451" while protesting in support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Thursday, March 20, 2025, outside the IMLS in Washington, after hearing that DOGE had shown up to the office. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

NEW YORK (AP) — [President Donald Trump](#) has named a new acting director for the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#), one of seven independent government agencies cited in a recent executive order calling for their dismantling “to the maximum extent of the law.”

Trump said that the order “continues the reduction in the elements of the Federal bureaucracy that the President has determined are unnecessary.”

Since taking office, Trump has shuttered or drastically curtailed agencies, including the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The Institute of Museum and Library of Services, or IMLS, is a key source of funding for museums, libraries and educational institutions.

What is the Institute of Museum and Library Services?

IMLS was established in 1996 by a Republican-led Congress and has a mission to “advance, support, and empower America’s museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development.” The institute combined the services of previous government agencies, including the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the Institute of Museum Services.

It distributes thousands of grants nationwide, totaling in recent years to more than \$200 million annually. Awards in 2024 ranged from \$240,000 for the Chicago History Museum to more than \$1 million for several state library training programs named for former [Republican first lady Laura Bush](#) to nearly \$25,000 for the Lorain Historical Society, which is based in the Ohio hometown of Nobel laureate [Toni Morrison](#).

A spokesperson for Bush declined comment.

Who is the new director?

The new acting director, Keith Sonderling, had recently been confirmed as deputy secretary of the Department of Labor and was from 2020-2024 a commissioner on the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He replaces Cyndee Landrum, who had been named acting director in March 2024.

"I am committed to steering this organization in lockstep with this Administration to enhance efficiency and foster innovation," Sonderling said in a statement after his appointment Thursday. "We will revitalize IMLS and restore focus on patriotism, ensuring we preserve our country's core values, promote American exceptionalism and cultivate love of country in future generations."

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Has the IMLS been targeted before?

During his first term, Trump repeatedly called for the IMLS to be shut down, but funding was maintained by Congress. The American Library Association in a statement this week condemned "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."

What happens now?

The library association has advised members that the status of current grants remains unclear. If the administration follows the same playbook it has in [targeting other small agencies](#) for closure, IMLS could be shut down.

The U.S. Institute of Peace was one of four agencies Trump [ordered to be closed](#) last month in an effort to shrink the size of government. On Monday, Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency took control of [USIP's](#) headquarters in Washington and used law enforcement to escort the independent think tank's employees out of the building. Former USIP board members have sued the administration to stop the takeover but a judge on Wednesday declined to immediately block the administration's actions.

Staff from DOGE have also moved fast in the past weeks to lay off staff, end grants and contracts and remove the leaders of two other agencies that invested in small businesses in Africa and Latin American and the Caribbean. Former board members and leaders of those organizations have also sued, but a judge ruled it would be legal to [remove most staff and grants](#) from the U.S. African Development Foundation.

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