

What Happens to Libraries if IMLS Goes Away?

by [Hallie Rich](#)

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On Friday night, March 14, President Trump issued an [Executive Order](#) that called for the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and six other agencies. In FY24, the



[IMLS budget was \\$294.8 million](#), of which more than \$211 million was dedicated to library services through the Library Services Technology Act (LSTA), the leading source of federal funding for America's libraries. According to [a statement from the American Library Association \(ALA\)](#), "Libraries translate .003 percent of the federal budget into programs and services used by more than 1.2 billion people each year."

The mission of the IMLS is "to advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development." Its largest program, the Grants to States Program, allocates federal funding to State Library Administrative Agencies, which use those funds to support statewide services and/or to distribute through subgrant competitions to public, academic, school, and special libraries in each state. A sampling of the programs recently funded through IMLS grants includes a collaboration between Arizona State University and its state library with SciStarter to scale library-based STEM services that connect project scientists to citizen scientists; funding to the Tonkawa Tribe of Oklahoma for a library computer lab and afterschool tutoring for children; planning and management tools for small and rural libraries in Florida and Texas facing natural disasters; California's Veterans Connect @ the Library program, which educates vets and their families about benefits, including pensions and employment. IMLS provides a [state-by-state breakdown of its funding allocations](#).

Beyond project grants, IMLS funding supports the work of state library agencies. For example, according to [a FY 2023–24 report from the Colorado State Library](#), IMLS funds comprised nearly 60 percent of the state library's operating budget. Their budget covers state library staffing as well as statewide services such as the Colorado Talking Book Library, which supplies audio, Braille, and large print books for people with print

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disabilities. “Every State Library Agency is committed to serving the residents of their state with effective and impactful library services,” said Jeremy Johannesen, executive director of COSLA (Chief Officers of State Library Agencies). “This Executive Order runs entirely counter to COSLA’s recently released Statement of Core Values. It will be difficult for our nation’s state libraries to successfully advance their missions should Federal funding be eliminated.”

One avenue that COSLA, as well as EveryLibrary and other library advocates, is pursuing is to determine which IMLS programs are statutory obligations and which may be considered discretionary. This distinction is relevant, as the Executive Order calls for the “non-statutory components and functions” of the affected agencies to “be eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law.” EveryLibrary, in a recent statement, asserts that “Congress was very clear in the 2018 Museum and Library Services Act that IMLS is statutorily required (by Sec 9133 of the law) to send federal funding to state libraries under the Grants to States program.”

Without the federal funding provided by IMLS, the valuable programs and services that libraries deliver to their communities are at risk. As for current IMLS staff, the future is uncertain. The Executive Order directs the agency to “reduce the performance of their statutory functions and associated personnel to the minimum presence and function required by law.” A spokesperson from IMLS could not be reached for comment.

ALA President Cindy Hohl weighed in shortly after the EO was ordered with ALA’s call to action. “This is a time for unity. As a community of library and information professionals, we must face these threats by showing up together—library workers, friends, trustees and public supporters—to advocate for our patrons, our profession, and our core values. The existential threats we’re facing now call us to draw on our greatest power: library stories that touch hearts and change minds, especially for decisionmakers. We ask you to call members of Congress to tell those powerful stories that show the true importance of our libraries.”

ALA, EveryLibrary, and scores of library advocates took to social media over the weekend to encourage citizens to call their members of Congress and insist that IMLS not be eliminated. Using the information that IMLS makes available about its work—which the Data Rescue Project

recently scraped and saved—can help to highlight the impact that a small line item in the enormous federal budget can have on people and places across the nation.



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