

The Columbus Dispatch

LOCAL

Ohio libraries, museums could lose millions in federal funding from Trump executive order



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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

- President Trump signed an executive order that could slash the Institute for Museum and Library Services, which funds programs at libraries and museums across the country.
- Ohio libraries and museums receive millions of dollars annually from the institute, funding programs such as the Ohio Digital Library and COSI's "learning lunchbox" program.
- The White House says the cuts are meant to "eliminate waste and reduce government overreach."
- Library and museum leaders in Ohio are concerned about the potential impact of the cuts and are awaiting further guidance.

Libraries and museums around Ohio might lose millions of dollars of funding because of an executive order from President Donald Trump that targets the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

Trump's executive order, signed March 14, calls for significant cuts to seven agencies as part of his aim of "reducing government overreach."

Ohio libraries and museums have been receiving more than \$7 million annually from the little-known agency, according to figures from the institute and data provided by the Ohio Museum Association. Ohio's federal funding for libraries includes supporting the statewide ebook and audiobook system, summer reading programs and library materials for blind people.

National organizations, such as the [American Alliance of Museums](#) and the [American Library Association](#), have decried the order and have called for change. Local leaders are concerned about potential cuts to Ohio institutions and are awaiting additional guidance that could be released Friday.

“We’re all kind of waiting on the edge of our seat,” State Librarian Mandy Knapp told The Dispatch on Wednesday.

How Ohio libraries benefit from federal funding and could be affected

The State Library of Ohio gets about \$5.4 million from the federal IMLS annually, which constitutes nearly half of the budget for [one of the oldest state agencies](#).

Knapp emphasized that IMLS funding is a small fraction of the federal budget — [about 0.0046%](#) — but the funding goes far to help Ohioans through backing statewide programs and providing technology grants to local libraries.

Local library systems are mostly funded by the state and from local taxes, but the federal funding backs popular statewide systems and provides some competitive grants to local libraries.

“What I say about our federal funding is that it’s just the spark that lights the fire,” Knapp said. “We take the money that Congress found in their couch cushions, and we build a whole system around it.”

Michelle Francis, executive director of the Ohio Library Council, a nongovernmental association and advocacy group, told The Dispatch she is mostly focused on the ongoing state budgeting process — libraries lost \$27 million in state funding last year — but is closely watching what could happen from the executive order.

For example, about \$485,000 of the federal money goes to fund the Ohio Digital Library every year. [About 180 library systems around the state](#) are part of the statewide collection of ebooks, audiobooks and magazines. Local libraries pay for

content, Knapp said, but the federal funding helps centralize resources and leverage local dollars.

Ohio had the second-highest usage of digital library items in the country in 2024, second only to California, Francis said.

Federal funding also goes toward summer reading programs and the Talking Book program, which helps blind and physically disabled veterans and residents access books and library materials.

Local libraries can also get competitive grants for federal dollars administered by the state library. One of the programs, Guiding Ohio Online, provides a dedicated technology trainer for public library systems in rural Ohio.

Three library systems around central Ohio — the Licking County Library, the Logan-Hocking County District Library and the Pickerington Public Library — participated in one of the most recent rounds of funding.

If the federal funding dries up, the state agency's "signature programs would all stop," Knapp said.

"We would still be here — we've been here for 200 years, we're going to be here for 200 more years," Knapp said, but the agency would be reduced to their core function of a research library.

How could funding cuts affect museums in Ohio?

Unlike libraries that receive grants through the State Library, museums apply for and receive competitive grants directly from the institute, said Johnna McEntee, the executive director of the Ohio Museums Association.

Museums around Ohio have received nearly \$12.5 million from the the federal institute between 2019-2024, according to data McEntee shared with The Dispatch.

McEntee said the museum grants usually require at least a one to one match of local funding.

“These grants from IMLS aren't a handout or wasteful spending — it's an investment in our community,” McEntee said. “It shows responsible use of these federal resources by requiring community buy-in and local support, and ensures long-term success of these programs.”

Museums have a \$1.54 billion impact on Ohio's economy, McEntee said. Without some of these federal grants, programs could be cut and “entire communities could lose access to these important public spaces.”

Grants to museums are a fraction of the federal agency's funding to libraries: Museums receive [less than 20% of IMLS funding](#). Nearly 300 museums around the country got \$55 million in grants last year, including \$1.8 million to six institutions in Cincinnati and Cleveland.

Small and large museums around central Ohio have been awarded nearly \$2.5 million in federal funding between 2019-2024, including the Ohio History Connection, Wexner Center for the Arts and the Center of Science and Industry, better known as COSI.

For example, COSI was awarded a \$225,000 grant in 2023 to [expand its “learning lunchbox” program](#). The grant funded about 15,000 kits for COSI to distribute through food banks, museums and libraries to K-12 students around the country.

A COSI spokesperson declined comment on the possible IMLS cuts.

Although most people haven't heard about the IMLS, they have benefited from programs paid for through the agency and could be affected by funding cuts.

White House says agency cuts are ‘eliminating waste’

[Trump's executive order](#) calls for steep cuts to seven agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Studies, to eliminate “non-statutory components

and functions.”

Other agencies that the executive order targets include the United States Agency for Global Media, the Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Minority Business Development Agency.

A White House fact sheet on the executive order says that the order is “[eliminating waste and reducing government overreach](#),” following up on another executive order to slash other “unnecessary” agencies and committees.

“The American people elected President Trump to drain the swamp and end ineffective government programs that empower government without achieving measurable results,” the fact sheet says. “The government wastes billions of dollars each year on duplicative programs and frivolous expenditures that fail to align with American values or address the needs of the American people.”

Leaders of the agencies are required to submit a report to the Office of Management and Budget affirming their compliance and identifying what functions are required by law.

This executive order is one of at least 92 Trump has issued since the start of his term nearly two months ago, [according to the National Archives](#).

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